
Elodie Farge

France & Jerusalem

*“Holy” Conquests, Colonial Encounters
& Contemporary Diplomacy*



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The publication of this book is presented as part of the PASSIA Research & Information Program 2015.

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October 2015

ISBN: 978-9950-305-51-9



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Jerusalem and the Peace Process

1. If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. Jerusalem has strong emotional value, not only for Palestinians and Israelis, but also for millions of Muslims, Jews and Christians around the world. Its historic, cultural and religious significance for the three Abrahamic religions makes Jerusalem unique. For this same reason Jerusalem is one of the most difficult of the final status issues to solve. Yet, since the last European Union Heads of Mission’s report, Israel has continued to implement a policy regarding Jerusalem that is further entrenching the separation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, thus creating more obstacles to peace and a negotiated two-state solution.

2. Through the implementation of its policy Israel is changing the status quo on the ground and cementing its unilateral and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. The continued expansion of settlements in and around East Jerusalem; the continued construction of the separation barrier; the restrictive zoning and planning leading to increased numbers of demolitions and evictions; the restrictive residency permit system and the implementation of the Israeli Absentee Property Law; the discriminatory access to religious sites; the continued closure of Palestinian institutions; the inadequate provision of resources and investment leading to an inequitable education policy and difficult access to health care for the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, all systematically undermine Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, the universal character of the city and its potential as a future capital of two states.¹

[...]

¹ Excerpt from the “EU Heads of Mission Report on Jerusalem”, 18 March 2014, <http://www.kaapeli.fi/akys/pdf/EAST%20JERUSALEM%20REPORT%20-%20HOM%20.pdf>.

Foreword

The question of Jerusalem, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally, are subjects of extreme sensitivity in France, because of the compunction caused by Vichy France's collaboration in the mass killing of Jews during World War II, because of the trauma left by the Algeria war of independence against the French occupation, and because France is home to the world's third largest Jewish community after Israel and the United States. For these reasons and others, never in the country's history has a foreign conflict provoked such passions, such tensions.

At the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian question, Jerusalem stands not only as one of the most complex issues to resolve, but also as the most potentially explosive one with its highly volatile cocktail of religion and politics. Since time immemorial, Jerusalem has been the object of desire of a multitude of outside players who aspired to assert their power by possessing the city that is home to some of the world's holiest sites. In this fierce competition for the control of the Holy City and its shrines, which has made the place ever more sacred and polarized, France has played a significant part. Inspired by both spiritual fervor and political calculations, using either physical might or peaceful persuasion, the French attempts to conquer Jerusalem have left a multitude of material and immaterial traces still perceptible in the city today.

The present study seeks to synthesize France's cultural and political involvement in Jerusalem. On the basis of existing scholarship, media reports, political analyses and personal interviews with specialists and informed persons on the ground, it aims on the one hand to review the position of the successive French governments on the issue of the status of Jerusalem in the wider framework of the question of Palestine, and on the other hand to examine France's cultural heritage in the city as well as the descriptions and feelings it has inspired in French travelers, pilgrims, and artists throughout the centuries. It is hoped that this work will serve as a broad introduction to the subject, and will contribute to shed light on this specific aspect of the city's past and present.

Chapter One:

The “Holy” Conquests of Jerusalem

The Crusades and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem

To trace the French presence in Jerusalem, and beyond that in Palestine and the whole *Bilad Ash-Shams* (i.e. the “Levant” or “Greater Syria”), it is necessary to begin with the Crusades, an episode which not only had a considerable impact on the region but also set the trend for the future interventions of foreign powers in the Holy Land, characterized by an inextricable blend of religion and politics. The persecution of Christians and the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher Church in 1009 by the Fatimid Caliph Hakim, the “Arab Caligula,”² together with the defeat of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and the fall of Jerusalem to the Turkomans in 1073, were conceivable sources of concern for European Christians. However, when on 27 November 1095 at the Council of Clermont, France, Pope Urban II called believers to “take the cross” on the road to the Holy Sepulcher in order to liberate Jerusalem, “wrest that land from the wicked race and subject it to [them]selves,”³ he redirected the appeal of Emperor Alexios from its originally stated purpose. The latter had indeed called for assistance to contain the progression of the Seljuk Turks and reestablish the territorial integrity of the Byzantine Empire but not for a holy war against Islam.⁴ By performing a “substitution of objective”⁵ and calling instead for the deliverance of Jesus Christ’s tomb from the Muslims, the Pope emphatically crowned the concept of “manipulation for political goals of the notion of holy war”⁶ which had been developing in Medieval Europe.⁷ Urban’s strategy was to rally large strata of the Latin Christians under an emotionally mobilizing objective which could help him achieve his personal ambition: reasserting the authority of

² Sebag Montefiore, Simon, *Jerusalem. The Biography*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2011, p. 295.

³ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

⁴ Khader, Bichara, *L’Europe et la Palestine : des croisades à nos jours*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 1999.

⁵ *Ibidem*. NB: Most of the translations from French in this paper were made by the author.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Bennett, Steven, “The First Crusade and Development of ‘Holy War’”, <http://stevendbennett.wordpress.com/essays/the-first-crusade-and-development-of-holy-war/>.

the Roman Catholic Church over Eastern Christendom and strengthen his position in his feud against the German emperor.⁸ Likewise, those who heeded his call were not solely motivated by spiritual considerations, as the Crusaders' desire to earn the forgiveness of sins by fighting for Jerusalem was often compounded by the economic opportunities that this early colonization of Palestine could offer at a time of great difficulties in Europe.⁹

Frenchmen (i.e. born in areas constituting modern France) formed the principal figures of the First Crusade which ended in the seizure of Jerusalem; most notably, its spiritual leader Adémar, Bishop of Puy-en-Velay, accompanied by the military commanders Raymond de Saint-Gilles, Count of Toulouse and Provence, later joined by Godefroy de Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, and his brother Baudouin de Boulogne. After taking Ramla, Lydda, Bethlehem, and other Palestinian towns, the Crusaders began the siege of Jerusalem on 7 June 1099, and seized the city on 15 July. A terrible massacre ensued with ten thousands of people killed on the Haram Ash-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary¹⁰), as described in the *Histoire anonyme de la première croisade* [*Anonymous History of the First Crusade*]:

After entering the city, the pilgrims chased and massacred the Saracens up to Solomon Temple [...] where the carnage was such that the blood covered their ankles [...]. The Crusaders ran across the streets of the city, grabbing gold and silver, horses and donkeys, sacking the houses and stealing their riches. Then, weeping with joy and felicity, they went to worship the sepulcher of our Savior Jesus Christ [...].¹¹

Following the capture of the city, the Crusaders established the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and elected Godefroy de Bouillon at its head. Godefroy refused the title of “king,” believing that Jesus Christ was the unique King of Jerusalem, and took instead the appellation of “Protector of the

⁸ Khader, *op. cit.*

⁹ Caused by flooding and a plague epidemic in 1094, drought and famine in 1095, and “barbarian” invasions.

¹⁰ The compound housing the Dome of the Rock Mosque and Al-Aqsa Mosque (also known as Qibli Mosque), sometimes referred to as Al-Aqsa Compound or simply Al-Aqsa (Mosque) since the whole compound is regarded as a sacred sanctuary. It is considered as the third holiest site of Islam by Sunni Muslims. The site is also known as the Temple Mount according to the belief that it housed the Jewish temples of kings Solomon and Herod.

¹¹ Quoted by Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 24.



“The Crusaders’ conquest of Jerusalem, 15 July 1099” by Emile Signol (1847)

Holy Sepulcher.” He died in 1100 and was buried, like all his successors, at the foot of Calvary in the Holy Sepulcher Church. On Christmas Day of that year, his brother Baudouin was crowned first “King of the Latins in Jerusalem.” King Baudouin dedicated himself to securing and expanding the kingdom, conquering the Palestinian coast and establishing four Crusader states – the Principality of Antioch, the Counties of Edessa and Tripoli, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem – known as the land of “Outremer” (i.e. Across the Sea). He also founded a strong monarchy which brought to the throne of Jerusalem many Frenchmen, such as Baudouin II, Foulques V Count of Anjou, Baudouin III, Amalric I, Baudouin IV (called the Leprous), Guy of Lusignan, and Henri I Count of Champagne. In 1104, Baudouin I transformed Al-Aqsa Mosque into his royal palace and converted the Dome of the Rock into the Church of Templum Domini (i.e. Temple of the Lord), topping it with a cross and adding various ornaments and icons. King Baudouin was said to be a respected monarch, including among the locals, and accounts of his funeral in 1118 mentioned that he was mourned by all, “Franks, Syrians and even the Saracens.”¹²

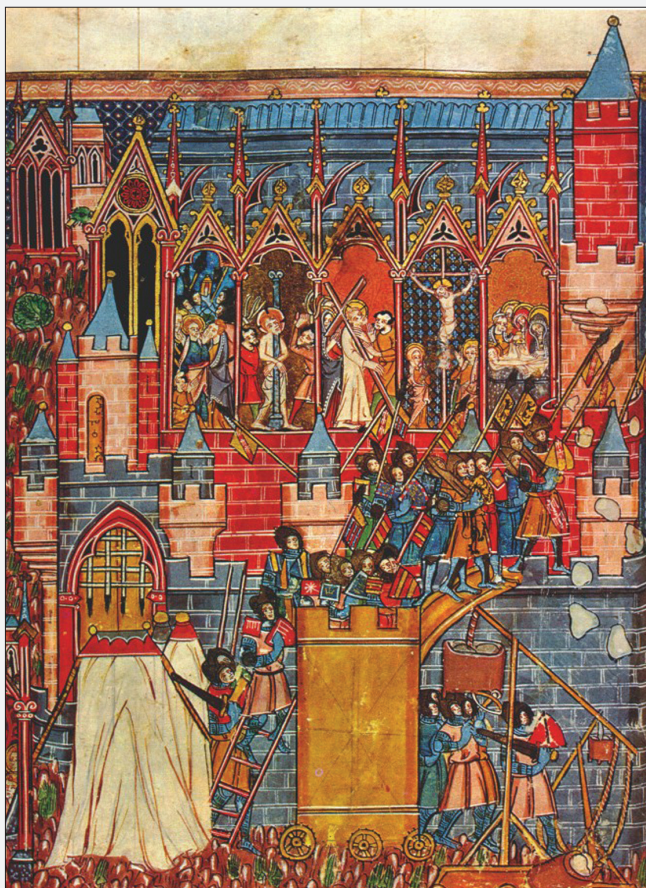
¹² Quoted in Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 323.



"The Funeral of Baldwin I"

in *Les Passages d'outremer faits par les Français contre les Turcs depuis Charlemagne jusqu'en 1462*, by Jean Colombe.

The necessity to protect the Kingdom of Jerusalem and pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land during that period inspired the creation of several religious military orders, such as the Hospitallers in 1113, who built their own quarter south of the Holy Sepulcher including a hostel and a capacious hospital, and the powerful Knights Templar. Founded in 1119 by the French Hugues de Payens on the Haram Ash-Sharif, the Knights of the Red-Cross Mantle converted the Islamic sanctuary into a Christian complex of shrines, arsenals and accommodations, adding a vast Templar Hall around the south wall, transforming the Dome of the Chain near the Rock into Saint James Chapel, and using Herod's subterranean halls, which they called the Stables of Solomon, to house their horses and pack camels.¹³ The architectural transformation of Jerusalem during Crusaders time, marked by a synthesis of Romanesque, Byzantine and Levantine styles, had another prolific contributor in the person of Queen Mélisende, eldest daughter of King Baudouin II and first Jerusalemite monarch to be crowned together with her husband Foulques in the rotunda of the Holy Sepulcher in 1131. Mélisende built Saint Anne Church a few steps away from the Noble Sanctuary compound, added an ornate iron fence to protect the Rock on the Haram Ash-Sharif, and on 15 July 1149 reconsecrated the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, placing for the first time all the site's holy places under a single roof.



“Siege of Jerusalem, 1099”, miniature

¹³ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*

All together, the Kingdom of Jerusalem lasted for nearly 200 years, administered by monarchs of various European origins. After being entirely overrun by Salah Ad-Din Al-Ayyoubi (Saladin) in 1187, the kingdom was re-established in Acre in 1192 during the third Crusade launched to retake control of Jerusalem.¹⁴ It was definitively abolished by the Mamluks in 1291. This long-term presence of the “Franks,” called after the ancestors of the French though they were actually from all over Europe, had a significant and durable impact on the local customs, institutions and demographic composition, as they gradually came to account for 15–25% of the population. Inter-marriage between Europeans and natives, mostly Christians or Muslims converted to Christianity, were not uncommon. Besides, with the passing of time and the birth of new generations, the Frankish settlers got progressively “levantinized,” mixing into the local culture, speaking the local languages, and thinking of themselves as natives. This phenomenon was well described by the French chronicler Foucher de Chartres who wrote around 1127:

Meditate on the way that God has today transferred the West to the East. For we who were Occidentals now have been made Orientals. He who was a Roman or Frank has in this land been made into a Galilean or a Palestinian. He who was of Rheims or Chartres has now become a citizen of Tyre or Antioch. We have already forgotten the places of our birth; already these are unknown to many of us or not mentioned any more. [...] Some have married women not among their own people but among the Syrians, or Armenians, or even Saracens having received the grace of baptism. [...] Expressions of different languages blend in their conversation. Words taken from each language have become the common property of all, and those who ignore their origins find themselves united within the same faith. [...] He who was born elsewhere is now almost an indigene; and he who was only visiting has become a compatriot.¹⁵

¹⁴ The Treaty of Jaffa, agreed on 2 September 1192 between Salah Ad-Din and Richard the Lionheart, King of England, is considered the first partition of Palestine: the Crusaders' kingdom was reestablished around Acre as its capital, while the Ayyubid sultan kept Jerusalem, granting full Christian access to the Sepulcher. On 11 February 1229, their successors, Salah Ad-Din's nephew Kamil and the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily Frederick II signed for their part a treaty of shared sovereignty of the Holy City which “remains the most daring peace deal in Jerusalem's history:” in return for ten years' peace, Kamil ceded Jerusalem (keeping the Haram Ash-Sharif with freedom of entry and worship for the Muslims) with a corridor to the sea. The deal ignored the Jews who had mostly fled the city. Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ *Foucher de, Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana, Book III, Chapter 37, in Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux, Tome III, ca. 1127, p. 468.*

Some family names in use in the region today, such as Franjié (Franks in Arabic) and Bardawil (thought to be from Baudouin), constitute evocative remainders of these interactions. However, despite these varied interplays, the Crusaders were not fully integrated into the native population, and the political system they established was plainly discriminatory against the locals who in the countryside were regarded as mere property of the western landowners. Muslims were especially ill-treated, considered as second-class citizens with no political rights. Jerusalem itself was an illustration of these injustices, where Muslims and Jews alike were banned from living for long periods, making the city small and under-populated. The native Christians were not spared the negative impact of the presence of the Crusaders, who regarded them as heretics and committed all sorts of abuses against them, including banning them from worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁶ In addition, the Crusades worsened religious divisions in the city, notably between Muslims and local Christians as the latter were suspected of collusion with the occupiers. Not surprisingly, the Crusades still represent a traumatic event in the collective memory of the people of the region. As the French-Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf wrote: “The fracture between the Western and Eastern worlds dates back from the Crusades, which have been felt by the Arabs, until this day, as a rape.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Decision of Arnulf of Chocques, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, in 1112.*

¹⁷ Quoted by Khader, *op. cit.* p. 18.

DESTRVCCIO: IHEROSOLIME





"Jerusalem" in *Liber Chronicarum*, 16th Century.

Jerusalem in the Eyes of French Pilgrims: Between Heaven and Earth

In the meantime, a countless crowd started to converge from all over the world toward the sepulcher of the Savior in Jerusalem; nobody could have foreseen such a multitude.¹⁸

At the beginning of the 11th Century, Jerusalem witnessed the arrival of numerous European pilgrims – be they anonymous, clerks, knights or missionaries – who, encouraged by the presence of Frank monarchs on the throne of Jerusalem, were eager to brave all the perils of a long journey to visit the Holy City and see the sites of the Passion of Christ. The flow of visitors rose to its peak in the 12th Century and did not dry up after the defeat of the Crusaders owing to the tolerance displayed by the Muslim rulers. As a consequence, Jerusalem came to constitute the object of many pilgrims' travel accounts, who thereby gave the first western descriptions of the city. Among the most renowned French accounts were *L'Etat de la Cité de Jérusalem: Descriptif de la Ville Chrétienne* [*The State of the City of Jerusalem: Description of the Christian City*] by the squire Ernoul (1231), the *Discours du Voyage d'Outremer au Saint-Sepulchre de Jérusalem et Autres Lieux de la Terre Sainte* [*Account of the Overseas Travel to the Saint-Sepulcher of Jerusalem and Other Holy Places of the Holy Land*] by Antoine Regnault (1549), and other writings by pilgrims such as Pierre le Diacre (1137), Jean de Joinville (1248), Nompars de Caumont (1418), and Albert d'Aix.¹⁹ The most popular account was probably the chronicles of Foucher de Chartres, who witnessed the capture of Jerusalem by the first Crusaders and later became chaplain of Jerusalem King Baudouin I. His *Historia Hierosolymitana* [*History of Jerusalem*], and his *Sermon sur la prise de Jérusalem* [*Sermon on the Capture of Jerusalem*] (1127) are considered sources of prime importance for historians. Another famous account of the time is *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople* [*The Merry Pilgrimage: How Charlemagne Went on a Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Order to See Whether Hugo of Constantinople Was a Handsomer Man Than He*],²⁰ composed around 1140. Though the pilgrimage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem is fictional, this old French “chanson

¹⁸ Raoul Glaber, Benedictine monk of Burgundy, quoted in *Jérusalem de la Pierre à l'Esprit*, École biblique et archéologique française (EBAF), Jerusalem, 1990, p. 33.

¹⁹ Macheda, Sophie, *Les Pèlerinages en terre Sainte d'après les Récits de Voyage (XIe-XIIIe siècles)*, Université Paris IV-Sorbonne (PhD thesis), Paris, 2009, <http://www.theses.paris-sorbonne.fr/these-macheda-sophie.pdf>.

²⁰ In the story, Charlemagne asks his wife if she thinks he is the most handsome king in the world. To the French king's outrage, she answers that the (fictional) Byzantine Emperor Hugo is better looking. Under the pretence of a pilgrimage, Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers set out for the Levant. They go to Jerusalem first, where they meet the Patriarch who gives them important relics and the title of Emperor, and then journey to Constantinople where King Hugo, impressed by Charlemagne's exploits, resolves to become his vassal.

de geste” (i.e. epic lyric) provides a precise depiction of Jerusalem’s market as it could have been seen by a 12th Century pilgrim.²¹

In fact, in some accounts Jerusalem was described with great minutiae, providing – like contemporary tourism guides – detailed tour itineraries and all the practical information needed by future travelers on subjects ranging from accommodation, tax duties, and souvenir shops. Like instantaneous snapshots, these descriptions of “Jerusalem-on-Earth” offered a picture of a dynamic, prosperous and bustling city.²² In addition, some of the reports of the time proposed to depict in a scientific manner elements of the surrounding natural and human environment, such as the climate, topography and cultural customs and ways of life of the local populations. Nonetheless, under the cover of an objective representation, the narratives of the encounter with the “other” mirrored the bias and negative stereotypes of their authors, whereby for instance the critics against the “Saracens” for their maintenance and running of the city were frequent.²³ Moreover, the representations of the “celestial Jerusalem,” which on the other hand emphasized the spiritual dimension of the city and focused on its holy places, remained much more widespread than the terrestrial and temporal ones, to the extent of giving readers an abstract and timeless image of the city as a “gigantic reliquary.”²⁴ They were echoed by the geographical centrality that Jerusalem was gaining during that period, as the city started being regarded by many Christians as the center of the world, with the Church of the Holy Sepulcher at its heart. Thus, European cartographic representations of the earth dating from that time placed Jerusalem in its very middle, and maps of the city itself represented it as a circle with the two main streets serving as the arms of the cross with its midpoint on the Holy Sepulcher.²⁵ An example of both this mystical identity and geographical centeredness is given by the portrayal of Jerusalem made by the French pilgrim Pierre le Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, who contemplated the Holy City as the place selected by God to be a point of convergence between heaven and earth:

In the orb of the earth a central place of common interest was selected so that salvation spread out very quickly at the benefit of all [...]. This place, situated almost in the middle of the orb, the Savior called it “the heart of the hearth.”²⁶

²¹ Richard, Jean, “Sur un passage du Pèlerinage de Charlemagne: le marché de Jérusalem”, in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, Bruxelles, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1965.

²² Macheda, *op. cit.*

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 265.

²⁵ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*

²⁶ EBAF, *Jérusalem de la Pierre à l'Esprit*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



The "celestial Jerusalem" depicted by Jean Duvet in *L'Apocalypse figuré*

The Eldest Daughter of the Church and the Capitulations

Although Charlemagne never traveled to Jerusalem, he initiated the tradition of French influence over the Christian heritage and presence in the city. Following the example of his predecessor Pepin the Small, the king of the Franks exchanged embassies and gifts with the Abbasid Caliph Haroun Ar-Rachid²⁷ to whom he was united against common enemies, the Omayyad Emir of Cordoba and the Christian emperor of Constantinople. Taking advantage of the good relations between Baghdad and Aix-la-Chapelle, the Patriarch of Jerusalem George sought to obtain from Charlemagne some moral protection and financial aid. Thus in 799 he sent a monk to Charlemagne's palace in Aix-la-Chapelle with eulogies and relics from the Holy Sepulcher, and on 30 November 800, as Charlemagne was in Rome to receive the imperial crown from Pope Leo III, George dispatched two emissaries to give him the keys of the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary, as well as those of Jerusalem and the standard of the city.²⁸ By consenting to this implied demand of protection, Haroun accepted that Charlemagne act in the interest of the local Christians, granting him the authority to build and restore churches, convents and hospices and to endow them with incomes for their upkeep. Although no formal treaty was signed, Christian property in Jerusalem was listed and protected,²⁹ and in return for paying off the entire poll tax of the city's Christians, Charlemagne was allowed by Haroun to create a Christian quarter south of the Holy Sepulcher Church (comprising a hospice for pilgrims, the Church of Holy Mary, a library and a market) which enjoyed "an autonomous administration of quasi-extraterritoriality."³⁰



"The tribute of the Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid to Charlemagne"
by Jacob Jordaens (1663)

²⁷ The Caliph sent Charlemagne an elephant and an astrolabe water clock, a sophisticated device that showed off Islamic superiority and alarmed some Christians as a device of diabolical sorcery. Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Odeh, Antoun, "The 'Protectorate' of Charlemagne", in *The Christian Minority in Palestine*, Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 1999. <http://www.al-bushra.org/jerus2K/charlemagne.htm>.

²⁹ The "Commemoratorium de Casiv Dei vel monayterii" (808), an eyewitness account written by Charlemagne's delegate in the Holy Land, gives the list of supported institutions and their personnel. That of Jerusalem is impressive: in the Holy Sepulcher only, there were in the year 808 a total of 163 priests, clerics and servants. Odeh, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Quoted in Odeh, *op. cit.*

This embryonic form of protectorate was then revived in the 16th Century by King François 1st of France through an agreement with the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent which would have considerable consequences for the French presence in Jerusalem up to the present days. The apparently unnatural alliance between the Caliph of Islam and François 1st – the so-called “Most Christian Majesty,” ruler of a kingdom hailed as the “eldest daughter of the Church” – was again due to the threat of a common enemy, the head of the Holy Roman Empire Charles V. In 1525, as François’ territory was surrounded by Charles’ army, who also held the French king captive in Madrid, the Regent his mother Louise of Savoy wrote to Suleiman to solicit him to “prove [his] magnanimity by helping delivering [her] son.”³¹ The sultan accepted, for strategic reasons (he needed Christian allies in the battle for central Europe against the Habsburgs) and for the prestige of counting France as its debtors. However this alliance scandalized Christian Europe and compelled François to “redeem” himself by asking the ruler of the Ottoman Empire the right to become the protector of the Christians in the Holy Land. The sultan’s approval was formalized in 1535 with the signature of a “Capitulation” (convention or agreement), the first of a series which would authorize France to protect its citizens residing or trading in Ottoman lands for the centuries to come. More specifically, these agreements guaranteed trading privileges, freedom of circulation and navigation to French merchants, individual freedoms for those living in the Empire such as freedom of religion and worship, and removed French citizens from the jurisdiction of local authorities in matters such as taxation or justice, giving them the possibility to set their own tribunals and nominate their own consuls with authority in civil and criminal matters. In 1740, the last capitulation extended this protection to all the Roman Catholic communities established in the Ottoman Empire, whatever their nationality, and to their properties.³² Regarding Jerusalem in particular, Article 14 of the 1740 Capitulation granted France the protection of the Latin Catholic communities in charge of the Saint Sepulcher Church, and Article 82 made the French responsible for the reparation of the holy sanctuaries.³³ To these rights grounded in law, the custom added later on the protection of the Eastern Catholic communities. The Vatican did not object to the religious protectorate of France. On the contrary, since the Muslim domination

³¹ Veinstein, Gilles, "Soliman le Magnifique. La main tendue à François I^{er}, le roi très chrétien", in de Sivry, Sophie, de Waresquiel, Emmanuel (dir.), *Mémoires du monde. Cinq siècles d'histoires inédites et secrètes au Quai d'Orsay*, Sophie de Sivry/L'Iconoclaste, Paris, 2001.

³² Mochon, Jean-Philippe, "Le Consul Général de France à Jérusalem. Aspects historiques, juridiques et politiques de ses fonctions", in *Annuaire français de droit international*, Vol. 42, Paris, 1996.

³³ Levallois, Agnès/Pommier, Sophie, *Jérusalem de la division au partage ?*, Michalon, Paris, 1995.



"Francois I and Suleiman the Magnificent" by Titian (circa 1530)

of the Holy Land by the Arabs in 638 and the Ottomans in 1516-1517, the head of the pontifical state, who could not have relations with the "Infidels," was grateful for the support of a secular power like France to protect the Christian holy places and believers in the Holy Land.

While inaugurating the prominent role that France would play in the region,³⁴ the Capitulations also marked the beginning of the submission of the Ottoman Empire to the appetites of foreign powers. Inspired by preoccupations that were above all commercial at a time when the empire was at the maximum of its wealth and glory, the Capitulations became increasingly unjust and pervasive as the European powers tried to take advantage of the progressive weakening of the Sublime Porte.³⁵ Bestowed with expanding fiscal³⁶ and juridical privileges, European merchants

³⁴ This preeminence was not undermined by the signature of similar Capitulations by England, Holland and Austria. Levallois/Pommier, *op. cit.*

³⁵ The central government of the Ottoman Empire. The name is a French translation of Turkish Bâbüâli ("High Gate," or "Gate of the Eminent"), which was the official name of the gate giving access to the block of buildings in Constantinople, or Istanbul, that housed the principal state departments.

³⁶ European goods and merchants benefitted from lower custom duties (-5%), exemption from internal taxes, and diplomatic protection. On the other hand, local merchandises were subject to high domestic taxes. Khader, *op. cit.*

ended up obtaining the monopoly of the economic and commercial activities of the empire, invading the local markets with their products. As a result, in the 18th Century France asserted itself as the first commercial partner of the Middle East, with the harbor of Marseilles becoming the favored place of transit.³⁷ Eventually the French “comptoirs,” i.e. the country’s trading posts in the Ottoman Empire, came to form real “states in the state,”³⁸ and the native religious minorities, from a status of “protected” group gradually became “subjects” of the western powers.³⁹ As summarized by B. Khader, from the 17th Century onward the regime of Capitulations became a “real colonial pact imposed on the Ottoman Empire,”⁴⁰ undermining both its socio-economic basis and the peaceful coexistence among its various religious communities because of the granting of special favors to the Christian minorities and the distinction operated between Latin and non-Latin communities for the control of the Christian holy places.⁴¹

Bonaparte’s Expedition

It is in this context that the first French consulate in Jerusalem – the first foreign consulate ever in the city – was established in 1620. Unlike for the opening of other French diplomatic missions in the region, the decision was not motivated by commercial reasons and the necessity of assisting French traders, since Jerusalem was still a small and sparsely populated town which lacked specific commercial appeal. Rather, the reasons, as always in the city, were politico-religious. It is following an incident between Franciscans and Armenians at the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem – regarding two lamps suspended by the latter in disregard of the rights recognized to the Latins – that King Louis XIII of France decided to nominate the first consul of France in Jerusalem “for

³⁷ The Marseilles Chamber of Commerce managed the whole network of “Echelles” (port of call, from the Latin “escales,” i.e. ladder used to disembark).

³⁸ Khader, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Laurens, Henry, *L’Orient arabe : arabisme et islamisme de 1798 à 1945*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1993 (2nd edition 2000), pp. 65-66; and *La question de Palestine*, Vol. 1, Fayard, Paris, 1999, pp 61-65.

⁴⁰ Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Levallois/Pommier, *op. cit.* Originally served by a local clergy dependent on Byzantium (Greek), with time the Holy Land welcomed believers of other rites. In addition to the Latins, whose number increased significantly during the Crusades, the region saw a multiplication of Churches (Gregorian, Armenian, Jacobite, Syrian, Coptic, Abyssinian, Nestorian), which caused tensions culminating in the antagonism between Franciscans (the dominant expression of the Roman clergy) and the Greek Church.

the glory of God and the relief of the pious persons who, out of devotion, visit the Holy Places.”⁴² However, this noble mission would quickly prove difficult and perilous to complete for the various consuls who succeeded one another intermittently for over a century until the consulate’s temporary closure in 1714: the first consul, Jean Lempereur (1621-1625), ended up sequestered, ransomed and expelled by locals; the second, Sébastien de Brémond (1699-1700), was expatriated under army escort; and although the third, Jean de Blacas (1713-1714), having learnt from experience, arrived in Jerusalem *incognito*, he had to be called back only four months later in front of the combined opposition of the Franciscans and the local authorities.⁴³ In fact, the colorful misadventures of the French consuls were indicative of the intense struggles for power between foreign nations existing in the city at the time. In addition to the spontaneous hostility of the local officials, who fomented riots and sometimes even accused the consuls of complicity with their opponents, the difficulties came from the multiple rivalries and frictions which raged between the various Christian denominations (especially between Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics since the 1054 Great Schism⁴⁴), and within the denominations themselves (such as among Catholics, whereby the Franciscans, well established in the city since the 14th Century, feared the concurrence of the other Latin orders).⁴⁵ Increasingly, foreign powers intervened in these struggles, each one trying to impose its own political agenda through the religious communities it was in charge of protecting as per the Capitulation agreements.

The first concrete example of this growing foreign interventionism was the military campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte in Palestine and Syria in the immediate aftermath of his Egypt expedition. Under the pretext of rescuing the Arab populations oppressed by their Ottoman rulers, General Bonaparte pursued both personal ambitions (at his return in France, he would conduct the *coup d'état* which would make him emperor) and political and military objectives, which included the support of Muhammad Ali’s Egypt (where he ambitioned to establish a permanent French colony) against the alliance sealed between Russia, Britain and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the cre-

⁴² Letter of the king to his ambassador in Constantinople, 1621. Quoted in Mochon, *op. cit.* See also Neuville, René (French consul general in Jerusalem from 1946 to 1952), *Heurs et malheurs des consuls de France à Jérusalem aux XVII^e, XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, published at the author’s expense, Jerusalem, 1948.

⁴³ Mochon, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ The Great Schism, also known as the East-West Schism, was the event that divided Christianity into Western (Roman) Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*





*"Bonaparte Visits the Plague
Stricken in Jaffa"*
by Antoine-Jean Gros (1804)

ation of a safe passage to Europe via land when the maritime access near the Egyptian coast was blocked by the English and Turkish navy.⁴⁶ On 2 March 1799, as his troops carried out a raid just five kilometers away from Jerusalem, Bonaparte fantasized about the conquest of the city, reporting to the revolutionary Directorate in Paris: “By the time you read this letter, it is possible that I will be standing in the ruins of Solomon’s Temple.”⁴⁷ However the French general decided to conquest the Palestinian littoral before eventually “com[ing] in person [to Jerusalem] and plant the tree of Liberty at the very spot where Christ suffered.”⁴⁸ His dream never materialized though, as his Palestinian military expedition met its end in Akko, where he was defeated by an English-Turkish-Arab coalition. This was probably a narrow escape for the population of Jerusalem, considering the massacre that Napoleon’s soldiers had perpetrated in Jaffa.⁴⁹ In any case, Bonaparte’s military campaign represented the first major incursion of a European power in the heart of the Arab world since the Crusades. “From that moment,” as observed by B. Khader, “the whole history of the Levant, and of Palestine in particular, will be marked by the interferences of the great European powers. It is the beginning of the ‘Eastern question’.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Laurens, Henry, *L’Expédition d’Egypte 1798-1801*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1989.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 457.

⁴⁹ During the siege of the city, Napoleon’s soldiers committed slaughter, looting, and rape. Bonaparte himself ordered also that a large part of the Turkish prisoners (between 2,440 and 4,100 according to the source) be executed.

⁵⁰ Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Napoleon, Precursor of Zionism?

In his *History of Zionism* (1919), the Zionist leader Nahum Sokolov mentioned the existence of a “Proclamation by Bonaparte inviting the Jews of Asia and Africa to join up with him to reestablish the ancient Jerusalem” purportedly published in the governmental newspaper *Le Moniteur universel* on 22 May 1799. The absence of the original has raised questions on the authenticity of this declaration, and it is now regarded as a forgery used by the Zionists to legitimize their project. The historian Henry Laurens, in particular, refuted its veracity by pointing out several factual errors, including that the proclamation was said to have been made from Bonaparte’s headquarters in Jerusalem whereas he never set foot in the city, that the name of the rabbis referred to in the annex are imaginary, that no mention was made of this declaration in the French archives or in the accounts of the expedition, and that Napoleon was reported as saying in January 1817 that the Jews’ desire to reestablish the Temple was “an unrealizable enterprise.”*

* Khaled, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58.



Le Moniteur universel, 22 May 1799





"View of Jerusalem from the Josaphat Valley" by Auguste de Forbin (1825)

Chapter Two

The Orient Question and the Peaceful Crusades

Imperialism and Religion

In the 19th Century, after decades of progressive decay, the Ottoman Empire became the focus of the ambitions of the western powers which vied with one another to safeguard their strategic and commercial interests in the region and guarantee their share in the forthcoming dismembering of the “Sick Man of Europe.” Located at the geographic intersection of three continents and regarded as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, Palestine in particular was coveted by all. And so was Jerusalem: benefitting from the Ottoman *tanzimat* (reforms) and upgraded in 1872 to the rank of administrative capital of the “Kudüs-i Sherîf” or “Filastin” district, the city inspired a renewal of interest from foreign nations and became the heart of their struggle for influence.

In this context of fierce competition, religion – and in particular the protection of the holy places and religious communities – became more than ever the favored excuse for political interference. In fact the successive Capitulations had allowed western countries to progressively expand their protection to a growing share of the local population, to the point that Palestinian Christians found themselves divided into sub-groups according to their affiliation to their respective foreign “protector:”⁵¹ Greek Orthodox were under the protection of Russia, Catholics and Melkites under that of France,⁵² while Protestants (and Jews) depended on England and the United States. It is with the very pretext of protecting their respective religious “protégés” that foreign consulates were established in Jerusalem during this century.⁵³ The French consulate, after a closure of more than a century, was re-opened in 1843 in the Old City, in proximity of the major holy places to better assert the French presence and prominence in the city. The use of the local Christian com-

⁵¹ Khader, *op. cit.*

⁵² In addition, due to the French colonization in Africa, the French consulate in Jerusalem extended its protection to numerous Jewish and Muslim nationals migrating from the region to settle in the Holy City. Danino, Olivier, “La France et la question de Jérusalem, 3 avril 1949 - 7 juin 1967”, in *Relations Internationales*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, No. 122, February 2005, http://www.cairn.info/resume.php?ID_ARTICLE=RI_122_0047.

⁵³ England in 1838, followed by Prussia in 1842, France (reopening its previous consulate) and the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1843, the United States in 1844, Austria-Hungary in 1849, and Spain in 1854.

munities as pawns in the western powers' imperialist policies aggravated the rivalries between the various local denominations and resulted in continuous tensions, as illustrated by a letter written by the French consul in Jerusalem, Joseph Hélouis-Jorelle, on 1 July 1847: "The clergymen of the three rites nurture hatred so vigorous and ingrained against one another that the Mahometan bayonets must intervene frequently to prevent bloodshed during Christian religious ceremonies."⁵⁴ To put an end to the discord, the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid decided to legislate on the matter in 1852, issuing a *firman* (decree) which froze as it was the repartition of the control of sanctuaries between the various Churches (in a context favorable to Greek Orthodox interests) and regulated meticulously their rights and usages of holy sites.⁵⁵

However not only did the *status quo* rules (as they became known), "by allowing the great powers to have a say in the status of Jerusalem for the first time, [made the city] a cause of international concern and not merely a domestic matter,"⁵⁶ but they also failed to restore calm in Jerusalem and Palestine. As a matter of fact, in 1855 the turmoil and disorder, aggravated by the weakness of the central government, was such that there were rumors that the French had the intention to send military occupation forces to Jerusalem to put an end to the anarchy.⁵⁷ The rules of the *status quo* did not prevent either the outburst of the Crimean War, which stood as an apotheosis of the fights between the great powers through interposed Christian communities. Opposing in 1854-1855 the Russians against an alliance of the French, British, Turks, and Sardinians, the war was fought under the pretext of dealing with violent clashes between monks of the Orthodox Church, supported by Russia, and those of the Roman Catholic Church, supported by France, in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem (regarding in particular the Latins' request to possess the key to the building's main entrance and to replace a stolen silver star, donated by France in the 18th Century, on the marble floor of the church's grotto). The real motive though was strategic

⁵⁴ Mochon, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Three groups of rights were granted by the *status quo* arrangements: those related to the establishment of religious institutions in the Holy Land, those which dealt with a specific religious group, and those connected with particular holy places. These rules, which were given international recognition in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, are still in effect today. Cf. Kuruvilla, Samuel J., "The Politics of Mainstream Christianity in Jerusalem", in *International Journal of History, Middle East Special Issue*, 2010. http://www.historystudies.net/Makaleler/664962228_Samuel_J_Kuruvilla.pdf.

⁵⁶ Kattan, Victor, "Competing Claims, Contested City: The Sovereignty of Jerusalem under International Law", Arab League's International Conference on Jerusalem, 2-3 February 2011, Doha, Qatar. <http://www.qatarconferences.org/jerusalem/doc1/doc31.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Yoram, Shalit, "The French Kingdom of Jerusalem: Franco-Vatican Rivalry in the mid-19th Century", in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 24-42.

and concerned the future of the Balkans, which England and the fragile new empire of the self-crowned Emperor Napoleon III were determined to wrest from Russian appetites. Following the war, in 1856, another Ottoman *firman* confirming “all the privileges or immunities granted [...] to the Christian communities or other non-Muslim rites” and institutionalizing the millet system⁵⁸ opened the door to further political manipulation based on religious considerations.⁵⁹

The “Clerical Republic”

France was particularly active in the battle for political influence under the cover of religion, and its efforts to impose its domination were especially manifest in Jerusalem where the stakes were not territorial possession as in the other countries targeted by its colonialist ambitions but the preservation of its status of protector of the Christian communities and holy places.⁶⁰ Although the French monopoly in this regard had been weakened by Russia, which had become the protector of the Orthodox Christians in 1820, France fared pretty well in this competition owing to its historical precedence. In 1878 it managed to have its “historical rights” to protect the Catholics of Latin rite internationally recognized at the Congress of Berlin gathering European and Ottoman representatives, who confirmed the *status quo* and affirmed that “the rights acquired by France are expressly reserved.” The French protectorate was then reasserted by the Holy See in 1888 via the circular “*Aspera Rerum Conditio*” which stated that “the protection of France, wherever it is in effect, must be religiously maintained, and missionaries must be informed so that, whenever they need assistance, they resort to the consuls and diplomats of the French nation.” This role implied a series of duties and rights. On the one hand, French representatives were in charge of assisting the Latins in their requests to the Ottoman authorities (including helping them to secure high-level positions in the Empire’s administration) and to conduct the delicate task of arbitrating the conflicts between Christian communities according to the *status quo*.⁶¹ On the other hand, they enjoyed various honors and protocol privileges, as highlighted by the *berat* (*exequatur*) of the French consul in Jerusalem which specified that he “will take precedence over

⁵⁸ According to which religious minorities were allowed to rule themselves in matters related to personal law (and in cases not involving Muslims) via separate legal courts with little interference from the Ottoman government.

⁵⁹ Khader, *op. cit.* As illustrated by the Lebanon crisis of 1860 where France supported the Maronites while the British and Ottomans supported the Druze.

⁶⁰ Shalit, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Nicault, Catherine, “La fin du protectorat religieux de la France à Jérusalem (1918-1924)”, *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem*, Jerusalem, No. 4, 1999, p. 7-24, <http://bcfrj.revues.org/3472>.

the other consuls and will be granted the honors usually granted to Muslim *beys*.”⁶² This provision made him the most prominent foreign personality in the city and materialized among other things into the granting of liturgical honors during religious ceremonies, including in the Holy Sepulcher Church where the French consul was reserved a special seat and was saluted by a highly deferential formula. Despite the fact that France’s diplomats continued to face the mistrust and sometimes hostility of the local authorities, these honorific practices were tangible signals of the country’s dominant position in the city at the time.⁶³



“The Holy Sepulcher” by Auguste Salzmann (1856)

⁶² Mochon, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Nicault, *op. cit.*

To further impose its influence in Jerusalem, France also sought to promote actively the establishment of French religious congregations in the city. As a result, the number of French missionary societies which settled in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine during that period grew exponentially until reaching around 130 at the beginning of the 20th Century.⁶⁴ The density of expatriate French clerical population in the Holy Land, which was superior to anywhere else in the colonial world,⁶⁵ was such that it caused much competition and rivalry in their midst, as illustrated by the comments of the superior of a French female congregation: “In Jerusalem, there are so many women congregations that when a man gets sick, there are always three to four communities who fight among themselves to take care of him.”⁶⁶ In addition to assisting the sick, the orphans, and the poor, these religious orders contributed to boost France’s image among the local population by running educational institutions aimed at promoting the French culture and language.⁶⁷ The strategic importance of this “cultural” diplomacy was described by a French pilgrim, Lucien Alazard, commenting on the Frères Schools which were being established throughout Palestine by the French Brothers of the Christian Schools:

Among all the nations, France possesses an incredible power of moral conquest. Anywhere it goes, it imposes its faith, its mores, its customs, its whims. [...] It would suffice to give the Christian schools a serious and powerful patronage. Under their action, France could expand its genius everywhere; it would be loved, it would conquer the hearts.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ As inventoried in the Mytilène (1901) and Constantinople (1913) agreements which conferred to France the diplomatic protection of a number of religious establishments. Danino, *op. cit.* Among them were the Benedictines, Lazarists, Dominicans, Assumptionists, White Fathers, and many congregations of women like the pioneer Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Apparition. Cf. Lamure, Bertrand, “Les congrégations féminines françaises en Terre sainte au 19^e siècle”, in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 43-52.

⁶⁵ Mardam-Bey, Farouk/Kassir, Samir, *Itinéraires de Paris à Jérusalem, la France et le conflit israélo-arabe 1917-1958* (Volume 1), 1958-1991 (Volume 2), Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, 1992-1993.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Lamure, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ In 1914, around 90,000 pupils were attending French schools in the Levant, only 8.7% of them were Muslims (Khader, *op. cit.*). At the end of 1880, the Ottoman government started encouraging the opening of secondary schools on the French model. In 1901 the French geographer Vital Cuinet counted two of those in each large city of the Jerusalem district (Jerusalem, Hebron, Jaffa and Gaza). The district of Jerusalem was particularly well served as far as educational services were concerned. Cuinet tallied 374 educational institutions – including foreign ones, which were proliferating during those years – for a total of around 30,000 enrolled children (out of a population of 300,000, i.e. the best performance in terms of school enrolment in the whole Ottoman Empire). Lemire, Vincent, *Jérusalem 1900. La Ville sainte à l'âge des possibles*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2013.

⁶⁸ Galazka, Guy, *À la Redécouverte de la Palestine : Le Regard sur l'Autre dans les récits de voyage français en Terre sainte au dix-neuvième siècle*, Université Paris IV-Sorbonne (PhD thesis), Paris, 2010, http://www.e-sorbonne.fr/sites/www.e-sorbonne.fr/files/theses/Galazka_Guy_2010_these.sans_illustrations2.pdf, p. 533.

College des Frères - Jerusalem

In 1878, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, an educational institution established in Reims in 1684 by the French priest Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* and dedicated to the teaching of the poor, opened a boys school in the Old City of Jerusalem, followed by a novitiate in 1885. In the successive years, Lasallian educational institutions reached out to other Palestinian cities: Jaffa in 1882, Haifa in 1884, Bethlehem in 1893, and Nazareth in 1893. The “civilizing,” “enlightening,” missionary and nationalistic ambitions of these schools were highlighted by French pilgrims. Father Havard, for instance, praised how they would “Spread the salutary influence of a truly Christian education and the knowledge of our beautiful language [...]; lift and strengthen characters; teach habits of order, labor, cleanliness, economy, alas! so unknown among the locals; and form a generation dedicated to the Church and friendly to France.” Another one, Lucien Alazard, commended how these institutions “Train in the Holy Land generations of real French. There the Catholics are bolstered in their faith, and the infidels or dissidents receive the lights which may illuminate them some day with the full truth of the Gospel.”**

* De La Salle was canonized in 1900 and proclaimed by the Vatican patron saint of all teachers in 1950. Lasallian educational institutions teach over 900,000 students in 80 countries.

** Galazka, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

The promotion of the “French name” in Jerusalem revolved therefore essentially around the activities of the French Catholic missionaries, with their vast archipelago of religious establishments, charitable organizations and educational institutions – to the point that competing nations often accused France of hiding its political ambitions under philanthropic and pious work.⁶⁹ In return for the “patriotic” support of these religious congregations, France supported them in their construction enterprises, contributing financially to the building of convents (e.g. the convent of the Sisters of Marie-Réparatrice), hospitals (e.g. Saint-Louis, Saint-Joseph and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospitals), schools (e.g. the Frères schools, Saint-Joseph Sisters school), hostels for pilgrims (e.g. Notre-Dame de France), many health centers and orphanages, and churches (e.g. Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Church) – hereby partaking in the architectural battle which was raging in the city at the time among the various Christian nations.

Ironically, this collusion between religion and politics happened at a time when mainland France was experimenting the most anti-clerical episode of its history, with the expulsion of non-authorized religious communities under the Jules Grévy government, the 1880s Jules Ferry laws on the secularization of school teaching, and the 1905 law dictating the formal separation of the Church and the State. As observed by French statesmen Léon Gambetta or Aristide Briand – the pater-nity of the *bon mot* is unsure – “anticlericalism is not an exportable commodity.”

⁶⁹ Lamure, *op. cit.*



396 Tombs of the Kings. Königs-Gräber. Tomboux des Rois.

The Tombs of the Kings in Jerusalem, 1910-1920
Courtesy of the American Colony, Matson Eric Collection

The Scientific Capture of Jerusalem

The French efforts for power and prestige in Jerusalem were not limited to educational and charitable work but extended to the “recapture of the Holy City through erudition and archeology.”⁷⁰ Back then, and especially in the second half of the 19th Century, archeology became eminently political, both “empire-building by other means” and “a science in the service of God: if it confirmed the truth of the Bible and the Passion, Christians could reclaim the Holy Land itself.”⁷¹ In the city, archeology aimed essentially to “reconstitute the Jerusalem of Christ”⁷² for both confessional and nationalistic purposes, contributing to a general process of patrimonialization and sanctuarization.⁷³ Indeed, in the framework of the foreign powers’ struggle for influence, Jerusalem witnessed a proliferation of holy sites associated with the latter’s various protected religious orders, like so many projections of national power which transformed the city into a “gigantic factory of heritage.”⁷⁴ It is in this context that the first French exploratory missions in the city were conducted. In 1850 the French numismatist and historian of antiquity Félicien de Saulcy organized a first mission to the Holy Land, where no archaeologist had yet truly ventured to go.⁷⁵ He explored Palestine, both sides of the Dead Sea and the ruins of Jerusalem. In 1863 he launched another expedition – comprised of the cartographer Charles Gélis, the Orientalist painter and photograph Auguste Salzmänn, the archeologist Charles Gaillardot, the geographer Victor Guérin, the architect Charles Mauss, and the scientist Jean-Hippolyte Michon - responsible for the herbarium.⁷⁶ On that occasion, de Saulcy returned to Jerusalem and resumed his work on the Haram Ash-Sharif and the Tombs of the Kings, where he conducted the very first digging of the Holy Land.⁷⁷ He transferred one of the unearthed sarcophagus, which he claimed controversially was related to King David (it was in fact the tomb of the Queen of Adiabene dating from a

⁷⁰ Lemire, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

⁷² Lemire, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁷³ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.* As illustrated by the invention in the mid-19th Century of the Garden Tomb by the Protestants as an alternative to the Holy Sepulcher Church as the presumed site of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁷⁵ IFPO/EBAF, “150 ans de contribution française à l’Archéologie palestinienne”, Jerusalem, 2012. <http://archeopalestine.ifpoorient.org/index.html>.

⁷⁶ Goren, Haim, “Charles Gaillardot, Physician and Scholar,” in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 99-124.

⁷⁷ IFPO/EBAF, *op. cit.*

thousand years later) to the Louvre Museum in Paris, thus initiating with others of his discoveries the Palestinian and Jewish collection of the museum. Another French pioneer of Palestinian archeology was Marquis de Vogüé, who conducted a study tour in Palestine in 1854.⁷⁸ In two weeks he gathered an impressive documentation on Crusaders architecture which resulted in the publication in 1860 of a reference monograph on the ancient churches of the Holy Land. Then in 1862 he spent three months in Jerusalem which led to the first scientific study of the Haram Ash-Sharif, followed by an essay on the topography of the city.⁷⁹ Appointed in 1871 ambassador of France in Constantinople, he promoted the implantation in Jerusalem of an Ecole Pratique d'Etudes Bibliques [Practical School of Biblical Studies], which opened in 1890 as the first European research institution in the city.⁸⁰ Initially dedicated to biblical study, in 1920 the school expanded its field of research to archeology under the name Ecole biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem [French Biblical and Archeological School in Jerusalem], becoming a powerful vector of French influence in this “open-sky biblical museum”⁸¹ that Jerusalem had become. Two priests of the Ecole, Fathers Louis-Hugues Vincent and Félix-Marie Abel, conducted a vast archeological study of Jerusalem and its monuments which resulted in the impressive monograph *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire* [Jerusalem: Studies of Topography, Archeology and History] (1912, 1922 and 1926). Although French archeologists claimed their scientific neutrality,

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ *Le Temple de Jérusalem, monographie du Haram-ech-Chérif, suivie d'un Essai sur la topographie de la Ville-sainte* (1864). Following a third visit to Palestine, he published in 1911 another book on Jerusalem: *Jérusalem d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

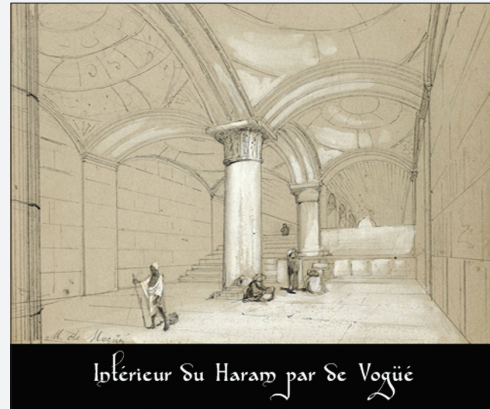
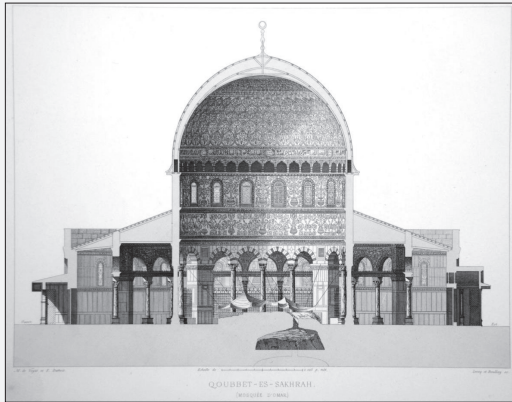
⁸⁰ EBAF, *Jérusalem de la Pierre à l'Esprit*, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Lemire, *op. cit.*



French caricature of de Saulcy lighting the powder keg with the Tombs of the Kings controversy

political and nationalist considerations were not excluded from their work as illustrated by the focus of Marquis de Vogüé on highlighting specifically the heritage of the French Crusaders.⁸² Besides, many of those scholars adopted unquestionably the stereotypes of the time on the land and people of the region, in the manner of De Vogüé who expressed that “the benefit of each travel in Orient is to put us in contact with the things and people of the past, who have hardly changed,”⁸³ or the French archeologist Jean-Jacques Bourassé, who wrote: “Wherever in olden days a flourishing city stood, now one finds a poor village. This is why one can say in truth that on this land eminently historical only the shadow of a great people and the faded memory of famous events remain.”⁸⁴



Sketches of the Haram As-Sharif (Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock) by de Vogüé (1862)

⁸² Trimbur, Dominique, “Les acteurs de la politique palestinienne de la France (1901-1948)”, in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 55-97.

⁸³ Macheda, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 65.



Marc Bonnier and Joseph Barnier landing in Jerusalem (1914)



Jules Védrières departing from Jerusalem (1 January 1914)

Archeological and religious studies were not the only “peaceful” weapons in the French arsenal for influence in Jerusalem. Similarly important were technique and hard sciences and, as such, French engineers, scientific experts and technicians were other crucial ambassadors of their country. The importance of this aspect was illustrated by the “hydro-political competition”⁸⁵ raging between France and Germany for the installation of the water supply network in Jerusalem, vital in a city which suffered from a chronic water crisis aggravated by increasing Jewish immigration. In the technical-scientific field as well France won several successes, such as the ownership by a French company, la Société Anonyme Ottomane du Chemin de Fer Jaffa-Jerusalem [the Ottoman Anonymous Company of the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway],⁸⁶ of the concession of the first railway of Jerusalem whose inauguration in 1892 placed the city a few hours away from the Mediterranean harbor of Jaffa, itself connected to all the capitals of the Arab world and beyond. When this race for national prestige through technical achievements also reached the sky, France was again among the central players: it is indeed a Frenchman, Jules Védrines, who was the first pilot to reach Palestine by air on 27 December 1913. When his landing, expected in Jerusalem, occurred instead on the seashore of Jaffa, the disappointment was great among the crowds awaiting him, and even more among the French authorities which were counting on that event to increase the standing of their country. This vexation was however quickly forgotten when a year later the French pilot Marc Bonnier and his mechanic Joseph Barnier were the first aviators to fly into Jerusalem. These “flying pilgrims,”⁸⁷ as they were called by Father Dollé of the Notre Dame Monastery, were welcomed by a multitude of Jerusalemites and the French consul himself, rejoicing as the plane then took off to Egypt to the tune of *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem.

⁸⁵ Lemire, Vincent, “L’eau, le Consul et l’ingénieur : hydropolitique et concurrences diplomatiques à Jérusalem, 1908-1914”, in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 125-137.

⁸⁶ Bought in 1989 from a Sephardic Jew businessman.

⁸⁷ Quoted by Gavish, Dov, “Pilgrims in flying machines: Palestine enters the era of aviation technology, 1913”, in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 139-151.

Orientalism and Biblical Petrification of Jerusalem

In the second half of the 19th Century, in parallel to the renewal of interest of the European nations for the Holy Land, the region witnessed a second major wave of pilgrimage. Western visitors, whose number rose from 3,000 during the first half of the century to more than 6,000 in the 1870s,⁸⁸ were encouraged by the improvement of the security situation, the establishment of the first European consulates, the creation of regular maritime lines of communication, and the emergence of touristic facilities such as hotels, European-style cafés, and integrated tour packages organized by religious congregations such as the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul or the Augustians of the Assumption. Most of the French travelers were from aristocratic and clerical origins and were motivated by spiritual aspirations, willing to revive their faith against the strong secularization and anti-religious atmosphere they were suffering from in France. Their first reaction when reaching Jerusalem was therefore of utter astonishment when realizing that the religious congregations which in their homeland were severely affected by anti-clerical measures were there benefiting from the protection of the French authorities. Typical was the reaction of the priest Father Alazard when noticing that the flag of the French Republic was raised on the roof of Notre Dame du Mont Carmel convent. “What a strange inconsistency!” he exclaimed, “Our rulers persecute clergymen in France and, here, they protect them!”⁸⁹

As a matter of fact, it appears from the accounts of those pilgrims, in a trend common to the whole European travel literature on Jerusalem in this period, that the Holy City did not meet their high expectations and yearnings to see at last the sites of the holy books.⁹⁰ French pilgrims seemed particularly disappointed by the Holy Sepulcher Church, which they found noisy, dark and poorly maintained in contrast with the peaceful, bright and geometrically perfect Haram

⁸⁸ Galazka, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 495. Even at the peak of the Terror (the persecution of the "enemies of the Revolution"), the Convention (the French national assembly during the revolution) did not hesitate to prescribe to its ambassador in Constantinople, Aubert-Dubayet, to waive the French flag above all the churches and religious establishments under the protection of France. Mochon, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Even Theodor Herzl, precursor of Zionism, did not like the city: “When I shall think of thee in the future, Jerusalem, it will not be with pleasure,” he wrote. Quoted in Isphording, Bernd, *Germans in Jerusalem (1830-1914)*, PASSIA Publications, Jerusalem, 2009. Herzl later decided that Jerusalem should be shared: “We shall extra-territorialize Jerusalem so that it will belong to nobody and everybody, its Holy Places the joint possession of all Believers.” Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

Ash-Sharif.⁹¹ Many of them were also shocked by the “desecrating” presence of Ottoman guards in this utmost symbol of Christendom which they believed should still belong to France, seemingly unable to come to terms with the fact that Jerusalem had been under Muslim sovereignty for ten centuries.⁹² The epoch’s negative stereotypes on Islam were echoed in their description of the city. For example, the French pilgrim Joseph-François Michaud wrote in his memoirs: “It is in Jerusalem that one must see all the intolerance and pride that Islam inspires to its followers, and all the patience, resignation and humility that Christianity gives to its disciples.”⁹³ Similarly, many pilgrims came to Jerusalem with the full imperialist’s arrogance of the time, as echoed by the words of the French traveler J.-T. de Belloc:

It is not uncommon nowadays, while walking in some Muslim neighborhoods, to hear the frolics of a group of young girls dancing la *ronde* in their patios and singing in French *Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot* or *Sur le pont d’Avignon* [...]. The young infidels, completely uneducated to this day, destined for centuries to be no more than slaves, [...] the young infidels are finally raising their heads.⁹⁴

A similar “civilizing” and colonialist vision animated most of French artists, who conveyed a folklorized, exoticized, ahistoric and unrealistic image of Jerusalem and the Orient in general. Palestine was thereby mainly described by novelists and poets as uninhabited and cluttered with ruins,⁹⁵ as in the work of Chateaubriand who wrote: “Here and there appear some villages, always in ruins, surrounded by a few olive trees and sycamores.”⁹⁶ The French Romantic writer, ignorant of local realities, expressed also distorted, even racist, preconceptions of the local populations. For instance, he described a butcher doing his work in the most exaggerated way, mentioning his “wild and ferocious appearance, his blood-drenched arms” which made one “believe that this man had just killed his fellow rather than

⁹¹ Galazka, *op. cit.*

⁹² Some rare commentators underlined instead the respectful attitude of the Turks and their precious arbitration in the constant disputes between the Christian communities of Jerusalem. *Ibidem*.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 476-477.

⁹⁵ Galazka notes that in the first half of the 19th Century, Palestine faced difficult times marked by natural catastrophes (e.g. the earthquake of 1837), wars and internal conflicts, and that it is therefore not surprising that numerous contemporary travel accounts dwelt on subjects such as the low level of agricultural development and the distressed material conditions in which the local populations lived.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

sacrificed a lamb.”⁹⁷ In fact, for the author of the *Genius of Christianity*, Islam was “a religion hostile to civilization that systematically favored ignorance, despotism and slavery.”⁹⁸ As for Jerusalem, where he spent a week in October 1806, it was described in purely biblical terms. Indeed in his bestseller *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem* (1811), the motifs of incarceration and death, reflecting the flagellation, inhumation and resurrection of Christ, are overrepresented, giving of what he called the “deicidal” city the impression of a sepulchral place.⁹⁹ In contrast with the reality of the city, where at the time lived no less than 10,000 people, he conveyed the image of a large open-sky gravestone, writing: “When one sees those stone houses, surrounded by a stone landscape, one wonders if they are not the confused monuments of a cemetery in the midst of a desert.”¹⁰⁰



“Boucher turc à Jérusalem” by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1862)

The same image of a bleak and deserted city was reflected in the bestselling travelogue of the philosopher Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Count de Volney, who described in his *Travels Through Syria and Egypt* (1787) the “battered ruins of Jerusalem.”¹⁰¹ Likewise, the French writer and politician Alphonse de Lamartine,¹⁰² who visited the city in 1832, related in his book *Voy-*

⁹⁷ Quoted by Lemire, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ Quoted by Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

⁹⁹ Lemire, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, quoted p. 61-62.

¹⁰¹ Quoted by Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

¹⁰² Lamartine stood out from his contemporaries by contemplating the colonization of Syria-Palestine from a

age en Orient [Eastern Travels] (1835): “We seated the whole day in front of the principal doors of Jerusalem [...] we saw nothing, we heard nothing; the same void, the same silence [...] that if we had passed the dead doors of Pompeii or Herculeum.”¹⁰³ As his predecessors, Lamartine seemed desperately in search of the traces of Jerusalem’s lost biblical greatness,¹⁰⁴ for instance describing the Josaphat Valley, near Jerusalem, as “Divinely pre-destined and selected for the most painful scene of the Passion of the Man-God,” and wondering “[... Is there] a land more plowed by misery, more watered by sadness, more soaked by lamentations?”¹⁰⁵ Again, the most prevalent impression transpiring from the accounts of French writers was their deep disappointment from the city of their imagination, seeming to suffer from the widespread Jerusalem Syndrome, a psychotic state of delusion linked to the religious excitement induced by the holy places. This was crudely manifest in the letters that the prominent novelist Gustave Flaubert, in Palestine on a state-sponsored mission to assess the region’s trade and agriculture (and to recover from the bad reception of his first novel), sent in August 1850:

Jerusalem is a charnel house surrounded by walls [...] There everything rots, dead dogs in the streets, religions in churches. There are many s*** and ruins. [...] The Holy Sepulcher is an agglomeration of all possible maledictions. In such a small space there are an Armenian church, a Greek one, a Latin one and a Coptic one. They all insult one another, curse one another wholeheartedly, and encroach upon their neighbors for candlesticks and carpets [...] The Turkish Pasha holds the keys of the Saint Sepulcher. [...] If [they were] left to the Christians, they would inevitably slaughter one another. [...] Besides, one is assaulted by sanctities. I am replete of them. I can no more stand the sight of rosaries in particular. [...] And above all, all this is not true. This is all lies, all lies. [...] Everything has been done to make the holy places ridiculous. [...] It is whore in devil: hypocrisy, cupidity, falsification and impudence, yes, but holiness, go damn yourself.¹⁰⁶

concrete angle, conceiving the idea of establishing a farm on the European model in the Haifa plain. Galazka, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Quoted by Lemire, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ Abdul Hadi, Mahdi (ed.), *Jerusalem of Art*, PASSIA, Jerusalem, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Galazka, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in “Jérusalem. De la forteresse cananéenne aux Lieux saints de toutes les querelles,” in *L'Histoire*, Sophia Publications, Paris, No. 378, July-August 2012, p. 62, www.cairn.info/magazine-l-histoire-2012-7-page-62.htm.

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Yet, for all their irreverence, many of these writers could not help but be impressed by Jerusalem, Flaubert himself considering her “diabolically grand.”¹⁰⁷

Themes of decline, backwardness, inertia and religious sanctification were also prevalent in paintings and drawings, which abounded with representations of deserted ruins, religious monuments, and primitive characters dressed in biblical clothing, as illustrated by the “View of Jerusalem from the Josaphat Valley” by Auguste de Forbin (1825) or “Jerusalem from the Environs” by Charles-Théodore Frère (1837).



“Jerusalem from the Environs” by Charles-Théodore Frère (1837)

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

Even the first photographers, who started exploring the Eastern Mediterranean shortly after the invention of the new medium by the French painter Louis Daguerre in 1839, tended to portray Jerusalem in the same patronizing and religiously aggrandizing fashions,¹⁰⁸ contributing to the web of academic and artistic discourses, termed Orientalism by the Palestinian Jerusalemite intellectual Edward Said, meant to explain and thus control and appropriate the “Orient.”¹⁰⁹ During the 1850s, the French government began sponsoring photographic missions to the Orient with the objective of visually recording and cataloguing historical sites and monuments for French study and analysis. Among them were Maxime du Camp, who was accompanying Flaubert in his agricultural study-tour of Palestine, and Auguste Salzmann, sent with the specific assignment of



“Tomb of Saint James, Valley of Josaphat” by Auguste Salzmann (1854-1856)

¹⁰⁸ Abdul Hadi, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Berg, Keri A., “The imperialist lens: Du Camp, Salzmann and early French photography”, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, Routledge, Oxford, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 2008.



"Archways of the Holy Sepulcher Church" by Maxime du Camp (1852)



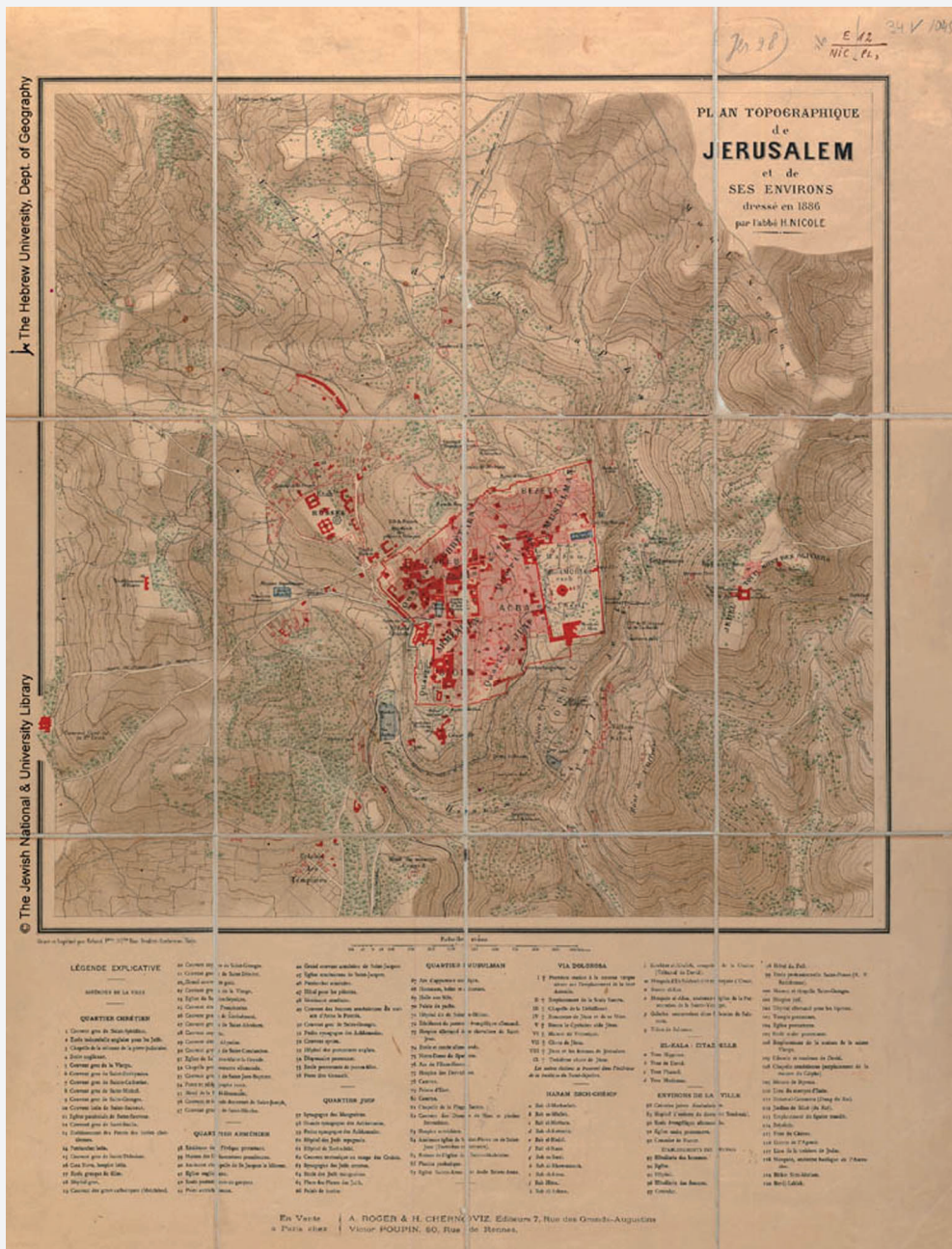
confirming de Saulcy's controversial dating of monuments in Jerusalem. Their albums¹¹⁰ set the stage for photography's role as an instrument of French imperialism, popularizing French views of the Orient and serving as a justification of colonialism – all the more efficient as photography was regarded as an objective mode of representation, purportedly reproducing the reality in a faithful, scientific and unbiased manner.¹¹¹

Another focal point of Western misrepresentations of Jerusalem at the turning of the century was cartography. Indeed the maps drawn by foreigners, mostly addressed to future tourists and pilgrims, represented only the biblical city with its religious buildings and communities, disregarding anything which differed too much from the supposed expectations of the readers such as places of daily life or the new city being built *extra muros* since the 1860s (although it gathered by 1900 half of the total population of Jerusalem). Besides, those maps were flagrant testimonies of the inaccurate and simplified way in which their authors interpreted the complex reality of the city so as to make it intelligible and compatible with their own understanding.¹¹² Thus the division of the city into four ethno-religious quarters (Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Armenian), which dates from that period and imposed itself as the predominant way

¹¹⁰ "Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie" by Du Camp (1852); "Jérusalem : Etude et reproduction photographique des monuments de la Ville Sainte depuis l'époque judaïque jusqu'à nos jours" by Salzmann (1856).

¹¹¹ Berg, *op. cit.*

¹¹² Lemire, *op. cit.*



Map of Jerusalem by Father Henri Nicole (1886) © BNF

to map Jerusalem, totally ignored both the local toponymy in use for centuries beforehand¹¹³ and the actual socio-demographic and geographical reality of Jerusalem at the time, characterized instead by a strong ethno-religious porosity.¹¹⁴ A map drawn in 1886 by a Frenchman, Father Henri Nicole, illustrates this importation of exogenous interpretations along with unfamiliarity with the local realities. In addition to leaving out almost completely places of mundane life such as post offices, hospitals, tribunals or *hammams*,¹¹⁵ the map clearly under-represented Muslim sites, mentioning out of 94 of them only two mosques and no *madrasa* (Islamic school), even in the so-called “Muslim quarter” where only three sites consecrated to Islam out of 21 were listed.¹¹⁶

All these imported descriptions of Jerusalem, which tried to portray it as if petrified in biblical times and organized along rigid religious lines, contrasted with what the city was at the time. In his recently-published book *Jerusalem 1900*, V. Lemire describes Jerusalem at the turning of the century as indeed a city engaged in the path of modernization and secularization, which distinguished itself by an important level of interactions between its various communities as exemplified by the mixed Jerusalem municipality established in the mid-1860s by local notables of all faiths.¹¹⁷

Jerusalem’s nascent modernity, so denigrated and even concealed in French pilgrims’ representations and accounts,¹¹⁸ was however caught on cameras by French filmmakers in April 1897. Only two years after the invention of cinematography by the French Lumière brothers, one of their teams arrived in Jerusalem under the direction of camera operator Alexandre Promio, to engrave the first animated images of the Holy City. The resulting 40-second sequence-shots allow the discovering of an unexpected Jerusalem, full of movements of everyday life, modernity, urbanity

¹¹³ See Adar, Arnon, “The Quarters of Jerusalem in the Ottoman period”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1992.

¹¹⁴ Lemire, *op. cit.* As illustrated for instance by the participation of Jerusalemites in each other’s religious festivals and ceremonies. See Dumper, Michael, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem and the Middle East Conflict*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2002.

¹¹⁵ He mentioned only 26 of these places out of 120.

¹¹⁶ Lemire, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ It operated without interruption until 1934, when it broke up into two distinct entities: one Jewish and one Arab. Lemire explains that in order to avoid any risk of foreign interference in the mixed municipality, the Ottoman government in its 1877 Municipal Law (Article 19) stipulated that city councilors could not be employed and protected by a foreign nation, to the great displeasure of the French and British authorities.

¹¹⁸ E.g., the French traveler Pierre Loti, who visited Jerusalem in 1894, complained in his account about the “banal and pitiful mass” of the modern city and the “horrible new suburb with its smoking factory chimneys.” *Ibidem*, quoted p. 59.

and ordinariness.¹¹⁹ In one of the nine sequence-shots, filmed from the rear of the Jaffa-Jerusalem train, the viewer can see an intrigued crowd gathered on the platform and starting to shake hats and handkerchiefs toward the departing train. Another scene, filmed in front of Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate, shows Jerusalemites walking around lively in their diversity and modern outfits, in contrast with the habitual effacement and "biblification" of the native population prevailing in the literary and artistic representations of the city back then. For Lemire, this contrast between the city as lived by its residents and the city as imagined by its Western visitors, this

chronological shortcut which continuously places under the eyes of observers the dreamt city in stead and place of the real city...

... is one of the major causes of the drama which is unfolding today in Jerusalem, preventing the actors of the conflict from making the necessary political decisions, precisely because of the sacred character which has eventually superimposed itself on the urban reality.¹²⁰



The first film footage of Jerusalem, made by a team of the Lumière brothers

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, quoted p. 70.

Chapter Three

The Franco-English Battle for the Possession of Palestine

The End of the French Religious Protectorate

France – where the father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, was residing when he presumably started to conceive the idea of a Jewish state in the late 19th Century as the only solution to anti-Semitism¹²¹ – had a decisive responsibility in the genesis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, first of all because it participated with Britain in the colonialist dismembering of the region which denied the right and aspirations of the local people to self-determination. France’s objective at that time was indeed to secure from the imminent fall of the Ottoman Empire a territorial share matching its rich and multiform influence on the ground,¹²² as well as guaranteeing strategic interests such as the protection of the maritime and aerial lines to Indochina and the Far East and the supply of Iraqi oil.¹²³ More specifically, France’s appetites were pointed toward a “Greater Syria” encompassing Palestine. Out of genuine belief in the beneficial effects of the “civilizing mission” it had been conducting there for the past decades through its educational, religious and humanitarian activities, French diplomats on the field sincerely believed that the local population was pervaded with a strong Francophile feeling and was eager to be placed under French sovereignty, even interpreting the Arab resistance to the dismantling of Greater Syria as a desire of its people to remain united under French authority.¹²⁴ To maximize its chances of materializing those aspira-

¹²¹ The Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl was working in Paris as the correspondent for *Neue Freie Press*. As such he followed the Dreyfus Affair (an anti-Semitic incident in which a French Jewish army captain was falsely convicted of spying for Germany), which is believed to have convinced Herzl of rejecting his early belief in Jewish assimilation and contemplating instead the creation of a national home for the Jews. In recent decades however historians have downplayed the influence of the Dreyfus Affair on the founder of modern political Zionism.

¹²² A UN memorandum dated 1947 states that “Among the organizations or institutions which have contributed and continue to contribute to the well-being and intellectual and material development of Palestine, the French charities are among the most prominent.” Danino, *op. cit.*

¹²³ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ Laurens, Henry, “La redéfinition des missions du consulat général de France à Jérusalem sous le mandat britannique”, in Abitbol, Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 167-183.



"Judicial Gate, Jerusalem" by Félix Bonfils (1865-1885). Courtesy of Cornell University Library

tions, France sought to reinforce its network of supporters and its presence on the ground during the first years of the 20th Century, including by increasing significantly its funding of charitable and educational work. As a result, in 1914 the French consulate in Jerusalem had become the most important diplomatic post in the city, with a strong local consular jurisdiction of several thousands of individuals, and a network of vice-consulates and consular agencies spreading over the whole *sanjak* (Ottoman administrative district).¹²⁵ In addition, to assert their political influence in the region, the French authorities continued to count on their “historical rights” – namely the set of documents and agreements which had so far defined the country’s protectorate over religious communities and establishments – endeavoring to obtain the confirmation of their formal recognition by the Sublime Porte. This was successfully attained in 1901 and 1913 through the signing of the Mytilene and Constantinople agreements, which reasserted some of France’s rights and privileges as protector of the Christians. In particular, through these agreements the Ottoman government committed itself to respect the fiscal and customs exemptions traditionally recognized to the institutions under French protection, whose list was appended, and to establishments which could be created at a later stage. These privileges included exemption from customs duties, property taxes and direct municipal taxes as well as a limit of six months to receive an authorization to proceed to the reparation, modification or expansion of buildings pertaining to these institutions. None of these treaties was concluded for a determined period of time and neither included a termination clause, which underlined the permanent nature of the rights reaffirmed therein.¹²⁶

All these gains were nonetheless imperiled by the outburst of World War I. On 9 September 1914, taking advantage of the beginning of the fighting in Europe, the Ottoman Sultan announced his decision to abolish the Capitulations. Then in November, after joining the war at the side of Germany, he ordered the seizure of French properties and the expulsion or detention of French nationals.¹²⁷ When France started the negotiations with the British on the cutting-up of the Ottoman Empire in this new unfavorable configuration, its strategy was two-fold: territorial – securing sovereignty over a Greater Syria including Palestine – and “religious” – protecting its “histori-

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ Mochon, *op. cit.*

¹²⁷ Laurens, “La redéfinition des missions du consulat général de France à Jérusalem sous le mandat britannique”, *op. cit.*

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Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916



cal rights.”¹²⁸ Paris was aware that this would be an uphill battle, so the President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs Aristide Briand authorized his negotiator François Georges-Picot to accept, in case of a categorical refusal from England to leave the holy sites to the French, “the neutralization of Jerusalem and Bethlehem.”¹²⁹ By this variant of “internationalization” France hoped to subtract Jerusalem from British hands. The idea had already been expressed in 1840 when, humiliated by the victory of UK Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston over their *protégé* Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt (who at the time was occupying Syria and the Holy City), the French authorities had considered a “Christian Free City at Jerusalem” – the first proposal for internationalization of the city.¹³⁰ However, in the final agreement made between Georges-Picot and his British counterpart Sir Mark Sykes in May 1916 (Sykes-Picot Agreement), France’s territorial ambitions were only partly recognized by the British: while the English zone of influence over Palestine was to include the harbors of Haifa and Akko, and while Transjordan and the Negev desert were to be part of the Arab Kingdom promised to Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence a year earlier, France obtained for its part an area encompassing only the Galilee from Tiberias to Akko and excluding the *sanjak* of Jerusalem. In exchange, the French succeeded at least in neutralizing the region of Jerusalem by having it placed under an international regime of a still undetermined form.¹³¹

However, no sooner had the ink dried on this agreement that England tried to challenge it, considering Palestine as an indispensable buffer zone for the protection of the Suez Canal,¹³² and coveting Jerusalem “as a Christmas present for the British nation.”¹³³ Taking advantage of the mobilization of French troops against the Central Powers in Europe, the British conquered Palestine in 1917 with the help of Arab combatants led by Faisal, third son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, making sure to sideline the French in the process. At that stage, Paris was constrained to downgrade its goals, which meant accepting to abandon any demand of territorial sovereignty over Palestine and focusing instead on the “religious” option as a way to maintain its influence on that territory by other means. This translated into two interconnected objectives: on the one

¹²⁸ Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹²⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁰ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

¹³¹ Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹³² Laurens, “La redéfinition des missions du consulat général de France à Jérusalem sous le mandat britannique”, *op. cit.*

¹³³ UK Prime Minister Lloyd George, quoted in Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 592.



Allenby enters Jerusalem, followed by Georges-Picot (1917)

hand the maintenance of France's religious protectorate and relative privileges, and on the other the placement of the holy sites "under the authority of an international commission, similar to that of the international commission of the Danube river," and whose presidency "should, as the case may be, be assigned to the French delegate who would at the same time receive the title of governor of Jerusalem."¹³⁴ The French ambitions, reminiscent of those of their Crusader ancestors centuries earlier, were however countered by the British. Although the latter appointed Georges-Picot as High Commissioner to General Allenby in Palestine and Syria in order to organize a Franco-English administration – which was the way French authorities really intended the idea of "international" regime¹³⁵ – the English rapidly made clear that they would not accept such a condominium and that the territories they had occupied during the war against the Ottomans, including the Jerusalem area, would remain under their exclusive authority. The presence of the French diplomat at the side of Allenby (together with American and Italian legates) during the ceremony of entry of the British army in Jerusalem in December 1917 was therefore a merely cosmetic gesture conceded at the request of the French. In fact, when at the party following the ceremony Georges-Picot made a public bid for France to share Jerusalem, telling Allenby: "And tomorrow, my dear general, I'll take the necessary steps to set up civil government in this town,"¹³⁶ the festive atmosphere was spoilt. One of the guests, Thomas Edward Lawrence, alias Lawrence of Arabia, recalled:

A silence followed. Salad, chicken mayonnaise and *foie gras* sandwiches hung in our wet mouths unmunched while we turned to Allenby and gaped. His face grew red, he swallowed, his chin coming forward (in the way we loved) whilst he said grimly: "The only authority is that of the Commander-in-Chief – MYSELF!"¹³⁷

Indeed, although the British initially allowed the temporary maintenance of the French religious protectorate, including the enjoyment of liturgical honors by France's diplomats, this was no more than a façade. Following the 1919 Peace Conference in Paris, during which Paris agreed to

¹³⁴ Nicault, *op. cit.* According to the author, the French authorities had also in mind to expand their protection to the Muslim holy sites.

¹³⁵ Laurens, "La redéfinition des missions du Consulat général de France à Jérusalem sous le mandat britannique", *op. cit.*

¹³⁶ Quoted in Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem.*

abandon all ambitions over Palestine in order to guarantee its mandate (i.e. a League of Nations authorization to administer a territory) over a Syria drawn mainly around Beirut and Damascus,¹³⁸ the San Remo Conference of April 1920 put the last touch to the victory of Britain in the battle for the control of Palestine and Jerusalem. The Treaty of Sèvres, which embodied the conference decisions, allocated to London a League of Nations mandate over the whole of Palestine, including the Holy City, while confirming France's mandate over Syria and Lebanon. At the "religious" level, France achieved its objective of making the UK accept the constitution of an International Commission for the Holy Sites and the appointment of its president by the Council of the League of Nations instead of the mandatory power (England) itself.¹³⁹ However, its second goal of having its traditional protectorate rights in Palestine safeguarded was much compromised by the peremptory refusal of the British (and Italian) delegates at San Remo.¹⁴⁰ Since the conference's decisions were not immediately confirmed due to Turkey's rejection of the treaty, in the following years France used all possible means to maintain its influence in Palestine by trying both to save some appearances of its religious protectorate and to secure a predominant role in the Commission for the Holy Sites.¹⁴¹ The first objective was essential to achieve the second, as expressed by a French diplomat: "We can seriously defend the principle of internationalization [of Jerusalem] only inasmuch as we prove the interest that we have towards the holy places and we surround them with French religious institutions."¹⁴² Therefore the French intensified their efforts in that sense, providing despite the lack of funds an extraordinary allocation to the Franciscan missions in Palestine, even contemplating the idea of granting a direct financial aid to the Custos, their superior in the Holy Land, and in general endeavoring to increase the number of French religious communities in the area.¹⁴³ In parallel, they tried to maintain their role of assistance to the Christian communities despite the attempts of Great Britain to undermine this last expression of French authority by encouraging local Christians to ignore French intermediation and instead resort directly to English agents. The British maneuvers were successful, constrain-

¹³⁸ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

¹³⁹ "The Mandatory undertakes to appoint in the shortest time a special commission to study any subject and any queries concerning the different religious communities and regulations. The composition of this Commission will reflect the religious interests at stake. The President of the Commission will be appointed by the Council of the League of Nations." San Remo Resolution, 25 April 1920.

¹⁴⁰ Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴² Trimbur, "Les acteurs de la politique palestinienne de la France (1901-1948)", *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁴³ Nicault, *op. cit.*

ing the French Chargé d’Affaires to the Vatican Jean Doulcet to acknowledge that the French “privilege cease[d] *de facto* since it existed only on the basis of the efficiency of the protection that we were able to ensure during Turkish times.”¹⁴⁴ In February 1921, France’s withdrawal of its soldiers in charge of the honorific guard of the holy sites under the request of Britain confirmed the fiasco.

The French attempts to be conferred a dominant position in the International Commission for the Holy Sites were no more successful. In fact, the negotiations on the issue proved particularly difficult, even partly accounting for the delay with which the League of Nations ratified the mandates.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, in addition to London’s absolute opposition to “the constitution of a permanent commission having a political character whose members would be appointed by others than itself,”¹⁴⁶ the talks stumbled over the rivalries between France, the Vatican, and the other Catholic nations regarding the composition and role of the commission. Eventually, preoccupied to safeguard at least its interests in Syria, France decided to ratify the mandates in the summer of 1922, thereby renouncing its main leverage on the question of the commission. As a result, the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine dictated through its Article 14 that it was up to the mandatory power to appoint a “special Commission to study, define and determine the rights and claims in connection with the Holy Places and the rights and claims relating to the different religious communities in Palestine.” Britain nonetheless failed to comply and, as noted by C. Nicault, by “choosing deliberately not to implement an international decision, somehow as right of occupation, set manifestly a pernicious example.”¹⁴⁷ The British reluctance, alongside the persistent incapacity of the Catholic powers to overcome their rivalries, thereby contributed to the failure of the first concrete attempt to internationalize Jerusalem.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Quoted by Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴⁶ Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

As for the French religious protectorate and relative privileges and immunities in Palestine, they were officially annulled by Article 8 of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine which provided that “the privileges and immunities of foreigners, including the benefits of consular jurisdiction and protection as formerly enjoyed by Capitulation or usage in the Ottoman Empire, shall not be applicable in Palestine.”¹⁴⁹ The revocation was then confirmed on 18 March 1924 by the papal nuncio, Mgr. Ceretti, who informed the Quai d’Orsay (the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) of the end of the liturgical honors “except inside the establishments belonging to France; in the others, these honors will no longer be granted.”¹⁵⁰ France’s failure to protect its religious influence in Palestine and Jerusalem was therefore complete, and the blow was such that to avoid further humiliation the French representatives in Jerusalem decided to desert church services at the Holy Sepulcher during the following Easter celebrations.¹⁵¹ In fact, with the establishment of the British mandate over Palestine, the collapse of the French presence affected all domains, from the economy, as exemplified by the selling to the British of the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway, which meant that France had no longer major economic interests in the city, to the gradual disappearance of the French language.¹⁵² As noted by J.-P. Mochon, when in 1930 France’s diplomatic mission in Jerusalem moved to more prestigious premises *extra muros*, it “gained in magnificence what it had just lost in terms of competence, since the British mandate ha[d] put an end to the protectorate of France on the Holy Sites.”¹⁵³ After enjoying for a long period a position of prime importance in Palestine, France was now relegated to the role of a border state.

¹⁴⁹ The article contained however a provision of particular importance for the post-Mandate period: “Unless the Powers whose nationals enjoyed the afore-mentioned privileges and immunities on August 1st, 1914, shall have previously renounced the right to their re-establishment, or shall have agreed to their non-application for a specified period, these privileges and immunities shall, at the expiration of the mandate, be immediately reestablished in their entirety or with such modifications as may have been agreed upon between the Powers concerned.” League of Nations Mandate for Palestine (Article 14), 12 August 1922.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted by Nicault, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵² In 1905 a French visitor observed that “Jaffa, where everyone speaks French, gives the illusion of a French city.” In 1922, at the symposium on the “French Language in the Mediterranean Region,” the assessment was already much less positive. In 1945, the French consul general in Jerusalem, Guy du Chaylard, observed that “the study of the French language has become a real luxury.” Trimbur, “Les acteurs de la politique palestinienne de la France (1901-1948)”, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁵³ Mochon, *op. cit.*

The Efforts for the Internationalization of Jerusalem at the United Nations

In the following years, France tried to keep a low profile and adopt a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Palestine in order to obtain the reciprocity from Great Britain about its own mandate over Syria.¹⁵⁴ However, when in December 1946 the last French troops were constrained to leave Lebanon and Syria, putting a definitive end to France's mandate in the region, Paris returned to a more offensive strategy against the British, which it accused of attempting to evict it from the region by exploiting its difficulties during World War II. France's hostility against London and its aspiration to regain some sort of influence in Palestine and the Middle East turned again to be a fundamental determinant of its diplomacy, inspiring both its policy towards Zionism and its position on the question of Jerusalem. On the latter, these motivations led to a strong activism to avoid that the city fall in the exclusive hands of Zionist or Arab combatants and translated into a strong support for the option of internationalization, which had officially become the French *leitmotiv* on the issue of Jerusalem. Therefore, when Paris voted in favor of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 181 (II) in November 1947, it was less in support for the partition of Palestine than to promote "the creation of a special international regime in the City of Jerusalem, constituting it as a *Corpus separatum* under the administration of the UN."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Laurens, "La redéfinition des missions du consulat général de France à Jérusalem sous le mandat britannique", *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.* Despite a domestic public opinion favorable to the UN Partition Plan, the French authorities were hesitant on the subject, taking into consideration the reluctance of the Holy See and, even more, the reaction of the Muslim populations of its North African colonies.

Jerusalem as Corpus Separatum and the Status of the City in International Law

The Partition Plan of 29 November 1947 (UNGA Resolution 181) provided that “The City of Jerusalem shall be established as a corpus separatum under a special international regime and shall be administered by the United Nations.”* The Trusteeship Council was entrusted with the outline of a detailed status for the city which would have later been submitted to possible modifications by its residents by means of a referendum. The status was expected to contain provisions on issues such as the system of government, the legislative, judicial and economic organization, security, the relations with the Arab and Jewish states, the special citizenship regime of its inhabitants, etc. Concerning the holy places, the status had to ensure that existing rights be respected, free access and worship be secured, holy places and religious buildings be preserved, and no taxation be levied on sites previously exempted.

Although Ben-Gurion had initially accepted to lose Jerusalem as “the price paid for statehood,”** Israel totally rejects the idea of corpus separatum, describing it as “nothing more than one of many inappropriate historical attempts made to examine possible solutions to the status of the city,” and denying it “any basis in international law.”*** In truth, as explained by O. Danino, “The corpus separatum has never been more than a plan, a project. The UN resolutions have never been issued as obligatory dispositions, nor have they been accepted by any of the concerned parties. It is permitted therefore to question the legitimacy of the position of the international community [...]”**** Nonetheless, many jurists believe that under international law, Jerusalem must be regarded as occupied territory until the status of the city is defined by an agreement reached between the principal parties. This position is supported by the UN***** and international customary practice, by which most states consider the de facto occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel to be unlawful, and do not recognize Israel’s authority over West Jerusalem de jure (in law), as evidenced by the presence of foreign embassies in Tel Aviv.

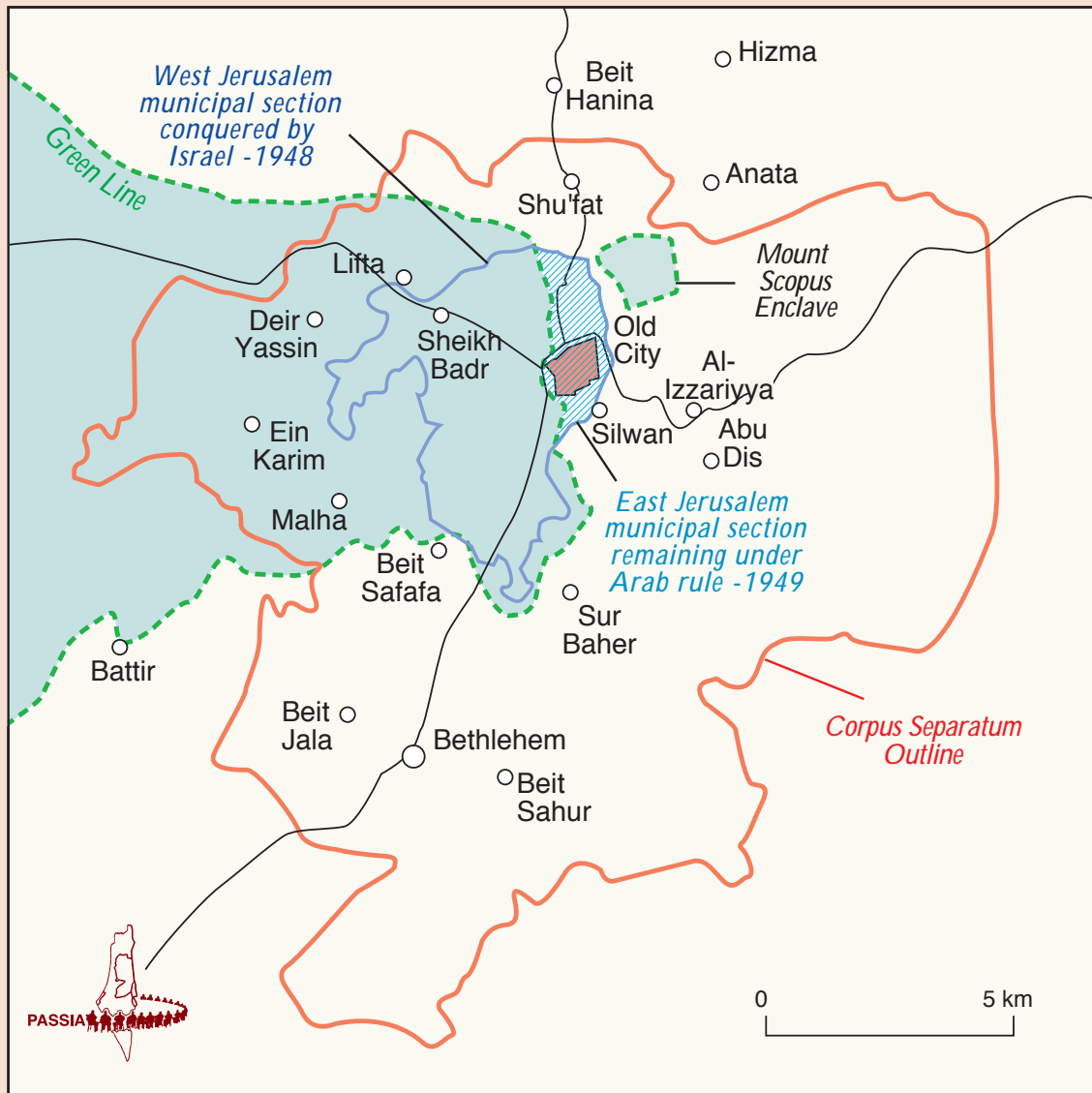
* “The Status of Jerusalem”, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ website. Quoted by Kattan, op. cit.

** Quoted in Sebag Montefiore, op. cit., p.662.

*** Danino, op. cit.

**** “[The city] shall include the present municipality of Jerusalem plus the surrounding villages and towns, the most eastern of which shall be Abu Dis; the most southern, Bethlehem; the most western, Ein Karim; and the most northern Shu’fat.” UNGA Resolution 181.

***** The current position of the UN on the subject is incorporated into the UNGA Resolution of 25 April 1997 (A/RES/ES-10/2), which calls for “a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the City of Jerusalem, which should be reached in permanent status negotiations between the parties, should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities.”



Map of the Corpus Separatum Proposal
© PASSIA

Therefore, when in 1948, in violation of the UN Partition Plan, Israel launched an assault on the city, leading to the occupation of its western side while the eastern one, defended by the Jordanians, fell under the control of King Abdullah, French diplomats endeavored to prevent any bilateral agreement between the two contenders which could formalize this *de facto* partition.¹⁵⁶ Jerusalem was indeed ardently desired by both sides: whereas Abdullah had himself crowned “King of Jerusalem” by the Coptic bishop in November 1948 and aspired to make the city the “second capital” of his kingdom, the Israeli ambitions were revealed by David Ben-Gurion right after the capture of the city, when he publicly declared:

We consider that it is our duty to declare that Jewish Jerusalem is an organic and inseparable part of the State of Israel [...] Jerusalem is the heart of the hearts of Israel [...] We declare that Israel will not give up Jerusalem voluntarily.¹⁵⁷

The French position on the subject was communicated by René Neuville, France’s consul general in Jerusalem, to his American counterpart on 12 April 1949: “The French government does not think that the safeguard of the holy sites can be guaranteed otherwise than through the internationalization of Jerusalem,”¹⁵⁸ adding that this solution alone could avert a full Israeli conquest over the Old City. And even when the partition was made official by the armistice agreement between Israel and Transjordan in Rhodes on 3 April 1949, France pursued its efforts to establish a legal status for the city at the United Nations (UN), believing that it would legally prevail over the armistice. For the French, this status had to be based on the concept of “territorial internationalization” (including, like the *corpus separatum* set up by the Partition Plan, the city of Jerusalem in its entirety, the holy sites and the neighboring villages) and not on that of “functional internationalization.”¹⁵⁹ The latter, which implied the mere internationalization of the holy shrines within a divided city, was favored by the Israeli government since the majority of those sites were located in the area controlled by Transjordan (which was also opposed to a full internationalization as it wished to preserve the Hashemite Kingdom’s custodianship of the sanctuaries¹⁶⁰). With the indispensable

¹⁵⁶ Danino, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁷ Levallois/Pommier, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸ Quoted by Danino, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶⁰ The Hashemite guardianship dates back to Sharif Hussein bin Ali’s visit to Transjordan in 1924 when he was still king of the Hijaz. On 11th March, he was met by a joint popular and official delegation from the people of Palestine led by Musa Kazim Al-Husseini, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Arab Palestinian

support of the Vatican, France managed to rally Catholic nations behind this idea, which was adopted by the UNGA on 9 December 1949 via Resolution 303. Vehemently opposed by Israel and Transjordan, the resolution restated the aim that “the City of Jerusalem shall be established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime and shall be administered by the United Nations,” asking the Trusteeship Council to complete the drafting of the city’s status. The proposed status, issued in April 1950, received France’s support since it once again advocated a regime of *corpus separatum* for Jerusalem. However the scheme outlined by the Trusteeship Council was far more modest than the one it had submitted before the outbreak of the 1948 War, which envisaged that Jerusalem would be administered by a UN governor entrusted with broad powers that would have transformed the city into a separate international entity with competencies in the fields of treaty-making and diplomatic relations. Instead, the new proposal not only substituted the strong UN governor by a UN commissioner appointed by the UNGA, but also preserved the divided *status quo* in the city pending a final settlement of the conflict.¹⁶¹

As a matter of fact, in front of the combined opposition of the two contending parties, a number of UN members began gradually to withdraw their support for the UN plan of *corpus separatum*. In January 1952, the UNGA adopted Resolution 512 which did not even mention the subject and called instead for direct negotiation between Transjordan and Israel, implicitly recognizing the UN incapacity in solving the issue.¹⁶² Notwithstanding, as the clashes increased along the Armistice Line, the international community again tried to come up with ideas to protect the city at the UN. On the basis of an Italian suggestion to make Jerusalem an open city in order to protect the holy sites in case of further warfare, the British Foreign Office called for a complete demilitar-

Conference, Al-Haj Amin Al-Husseini, Chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council, and Ragheb Nashashibi, the Mayor of Jerusalem. On this day, the people of Palestine gave allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate of Hussein bin Ali which was completed officially in Amman on the 14th of the same month. Cf. Ramahi, Sawsan, “Jordan and Jerusalem’s Islamic sanctuaries”, Middle East Monitor, July 2013, file:///C:/Users/Elodie/Desktop/Jordan andJerusalemIslamicSanctuaries_v1.0.pdf. The author adds: “When you consider the pledge given by both the popular and official delegations sent from the Palestinian people to Hussein bin Ali, it was a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate and didn’t refer to his guardianship or a pledge over the holy sites of Jerusalem. This pledge of allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate ended with his exile to Cyprus and the people of the Hijaz swearing allegiance to Abdul-Aziz bin Saud as their monarch. If we assume that they pledged allegiance in regard to the holy sites, then allegiance cannot be inherited – neither democratically nor according to the Shariah.” That allegiance was however explicitly mentioned in an agreement signed in March 2013 by King Abdullah and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas under which the Palestinian side “reaffirmed” the status of King Abdullah as the custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

¹⁶¹ Kattan, Victor, *op. cit.*

¹⁶² Danino, *op. cit.*

ization of the city. France supported these ideas and in 1954, following the fall of a mortar shell at less than 50 meters from the Holy Sepulcher, proposed a more ambitious scheme consisting in “neutralizing” Jerusalem. For the French government, this plan could “eventually facilitate the implementation of the functional control of the holy sites”¹⁶³ and the deployment of UN military forces on the ground. The solution was nevertheless considered by the Quai d’Orsay as provisory, aiming to minimize the immediate risks on the field until the implementation of the full territorial internationalization of the city as recommended by the UN.¹⁶⁴ However after the commander of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) General Burns proposed a more limited plan, the French decided to abandon also this idea of neutralization.



“The Jews’ Wailing Wall, a Friday” by Félix Bonfils (circa 1875) © Princeton University Library

Despite these unsuccessful efforts at the UN, France maintained its position on the city through a constant refusal to “recognize any fact on the ground, from any party, on the status of Jerusalem as long as the United Nations Organization has not expressed its view on the future of

¹⁶³ Letter of the French Foreign Affairs Minister to René Massigli, French ambassador in London, 29 July 1954.

Quoted by Danino, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem.*

the city.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed the two competing sides had started translating their aspirations on the city through concrete measures: while the Hashemite Kingdom formalized the annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in April 1950, David Ben-Gurion announced on 10 December 1949, in reaction to the vote of French-supported Resolution 303, his decision to move the Israeli government headquarters from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. France repudiated adamantly to recognize these unilateral acts, giving instead its consulate general in Jerusalem competence over the zones meant to become a *corpus separatum* and to constitute the future Palestinian state according to UN Resolution 181, while allocating to its embassy in Tel Aviv competence over the territory making up the State of Israel as defined by that same resolution, and assigning to its diplomatic mission in Amman a jurisdiction over Transjordan only. Furthermore, the French consulate in Jerusalem did not depend on the French embassies in either Amman or Tel Aviv, and the consul was not requested to make exequatur, limiting himself to present his credentials to the Israeli and Jordanian governors of the city. Last, the consulate premises located in the now Israeli-occupied part of the city were complemented with a new annex in the Arab neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. This unique situation generated some practical complications, for instance obliging the consul general, responsible for the whole city, to split up his time between the two locations and cross the Mandelbaum Gate separating the Israeli and Jordanian sectors of Jerusalem on a daily basis.¹⁶⁶ France preserved this firm stance in the subsequent “war of consulates” in which Israel tried to convince foreign states to transfer their embassy in the country from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in a bid to secure international recognition of its sovereignty over the city. Thus when the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs was transferred to Jerusalem in 1953, France boycotted the institution, contributing instead to the establishment of a special liaison committee in Tel Aviv meant to ensure the continuity of contacts with countries denying the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s political capital. Similarly, French representatives refrained from attending official Israeli events in the city, such as the “The Conquest of the Desert” exhibition organized in spring 1952 under the motive that it was “taking place in a city whose international status is disputed.”¹⁶⁷ The French opposition to the Israeli policy on the status of Jerusalem and the larger question of the French role in the protection of the holy sites and religious communities even played a significant role in France’s delayed recognition of the State of Israel. France abstained during the vote on the

¹⁶⁵ Telegram written by Neuville, 25 July 1949. Quoted by Danino, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁶ Mochon, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁷ Note from the Political Affairs Direction of the French Secretary of State, 21 July 1952. Quoted by Danino, *op. cit.*

admission of Israel to the UN in December 1948, which was eventually rejected,¹⁶⁸ and granted its *de facto* recognition of the country only in May 1949, after ensuring the reestablishment of its pre-mandate “historical rights” via the Chauvel-Fischer exchange of letters.¹⁶⁹

French and Zionist Brothers in Arms

If Zionist leaders surely deplored the French stance on the issue of Jerusalem, they could however be utterly satisfied with the way their relations with Paris were evolving in all other fields. Actually, France’s initial reaction to Zionism was rather circumspect – if not entirely hostile – and so for a number of reasons. First, French Jews and their spiritual leaders in the country were opposed to the Zionist project, which they considered a negation of their assimilationist philosophy. In addition, the French authorities perceived Zionism as an instrument of Great Britain to thwart their plans in Syria. Last, and more crucially, they were afraid of antagonizing the Muslim populations in their North Africa colonies and of seeing the Jews there, on which they counted to maintain their colonial control, succumb to the Zionist temptation and resettle in Palestine.¹⁷⁰ Officially though, the French government expressed support for the project of establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, as illustrated by the letter addressed by Jules Cambon, General Secretary of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Nahum Sokolov, President of the World Zionist Organization Executive Committee. Sent on 4 June 1917, i.e. five months before the Balfour Declaration, the missive stated that “It will be an act of justice and reparation to support the renaissance, through the protection of the Allied powers, of the Jewish nation over the Land from which the people of Israel were expelled so many centuries ago.”¹⁷¹ When the United Kingdom’s Foreign

¹⁶⁸ Israel’s second application for admission to the UN after a first unsuccessful attempt on 15 May 1948 was again denied by the UNSC. France, together with Belgium, Britain, Canada, and China, abstained on grounds that the fighting continued in Palestine and that Israel had failed to establish a demilitarized zone in the Negev. There were five major points of concern about Israel’s admission: its position toward the internationalization of Jerusalem, refugees, and borders; its willingness to observe UN resolutions; and its failure to apprehend the murderers of Count Folke Bernadotte. Cf. Neff, Donald, “Third Time’s a Charm: Israel Admitted as U.N. Member in 1949”, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, July 2011, <http://www.wrmea.org/wrmea-archives/370-washington-report-archives-2011-2015/july-2011/10548-third-times-a-charm-israel-admitted-as-un-member-in-1949.html>.

¹⁶⁹ Exchange of letters between the representative of the provisory government of Israel in Paris and the director of the Africa-Levant Department of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs between September 1948 and January 1949. They included Israeli commitments on the rights acquired by the French religious establishments in the past and a list of the concerned institutions, refereed to the declaration of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs accepting the principle of international regime for the holy places, and mentioned the question of the French recognition of the provisory government of Israel. Mochon, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁰ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Kaufman, Edy, “French policies and public attitudes towards Palestine, 1908-1918”, in Abitbol,

Secretary Arthur Balfour issued his own promise to the leader of the British Jewish community that his administration would facilitate “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,” a communiqué from the Quai d’Orsay confirmed that “the French and British governments totally agreed on the question of a Jewish settlement in Palestine.”¹⁷² However the real motivations behind this public approval of Zionism were perceptible in a subsequent letter sent by the French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon to Sokolow, which clarified that France expected its endorsement of the project of “creating a national home for the Jews in Palestine” to be accompanied by the Zionist acceptance of the persistence of “the primacy of France over the holy places.”¹⁷³ In addition to the unrelinquished desire to retrieve its “historical rights” as protector of the Christian places and communities, other political calculations had motivated these statements in favor of the Zionist cause, and in particular the need to please the American Jewry which the Quai d’Orsay considered instrumental in convincing Washington to join in the war efforts against Germany.¹⁷⁴

Le Secrétaire Général des Affaires Etrangères
à Monsieur Sokolof

Paris, 4 Juin 1917

Vous avez bien voulu m'exposer le projet auquel vous consacrez vos efforts et qui a pour objet de développer la colonisation israélite en Palestine. Vous estimez que si les circonstances le permettent et l'indépendance des Lieux Saints étant assurée d'autre part, ce serait faire oeuvre de justice et de réparation que d'aider à la renaissance, par la protection des Puissances alliées, de la nationalité juive, sur cette terre d'où le peuple d'Israël a été chassé il y a tant de siècles.

Le Gouvernement français qui est entré dans la présente guerre pour défendre un peuple injustement attaqué et qui poursuit la lutte pour assurer le triomphe du droit sur la force, ne peut éprouver que de la sympathie pour votre cause dont le triomphe est lié à celui des alliés.

Je suis heureux de vous en donner ici l'assurance./.

Letter of Jules Cambon to Nahum Sokolov, Paris, 4 June 1917. Sokolov described it as “*the biggest victory that the [Zionist] cause has ever obtained.*”

France’s support for Zionism became much stronger after World War II, when the involvement of the collaborationist Vichy government in the Holocaust caused a deep feeling of guilt in the population and made French Jews conclude of the failure of the assimilationist model.¹⁷⁵ Influenced by a more powerful Zionist lobby (in particular, the French League for a Free Palestine) and relayed by the press, a general movement of sympathy started pervading the French public

Michel (ed.), *France and the Middle East. Past, Present, Future*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 186. This statement followed a request made by Sokolow to the French authorities asking them to issue a declaration to be brought to the attention of a gathering of Zionist sympathizers in Saint Petersburg expressing French support for the development of a “colonisation israélite” (Jewish settlement) in Palestine.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 202.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁵ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

opinion and its leaders from all political affiliations, including the leftists who regarded Zionism as an incarnation of socialist ideals and progress as opposed to an Arab world seen as backward and violent.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, when the Zionists started turning against mandatory Britain within Palestine, the French authorities seized the opportunity to undermine their archenemy by making France a hub of Zionist activities (and at the same time discreetly supporting Palestinian nationalists¹⁷⁷). During the years preceding the 1948 War, the Socialist Guy Mollet government became therefore essential in strengthening the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) both demographically and militarily through the canalization of clandestine immigration, the transfer of weapons, and the training of Zionist fighters.¹⁷⁸ In the aftermath of the Algeria war of independence in 1954, this bilateral cooperation between France and the State of Israel turned into a real honeymoon as the two countries became united, in the words of the Israeli Army Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan visiting Paris in August of that year, around “a common enemy: the Arabs.”¹⁷⁹ An intense military cooperation ensued, including in the nuclear field,¹⁸⁰ making Israel the privileged client of the French weapon industry and contributing to the emergence of a profound and intense proximity between French and Israeli military circles. This “community of combat”¹⁸¹ against the Arabs soon focused on a specific man, Egypt’s Gamal Abdul Nasser, demonized in France for its support for the Algerian insurrection against the French occupation. Eventually, the nationalization by Nasser on 26 July 1956 of the Universal Suez Canal Company, seen by the French authorities as an insult to “the work of France,”¹⁸² provided the longed-for pretext to concretely seal this Franco-Israeli military alliance.

¹⁷⁶ For instance, the Socialist Leon Blum, President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic in December 1946-January 1947, was totally won over to Zionism and advocated ardently for a French positive vote to the UN Partition Plan.

¹⁷⁷ For example granting refuge to Palestinian nationalist leader Amin Al-Husseini in Beirut in 1937 as he was fleeing from the British repression in Palestine, and then to the other members of the Arab Higher Committee returning from exile in the Seychelles in January 1939, or closing an eye on the support sent to Palestinian nationalists from Libya and Syria. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Paris was considered the most important European hub of the growing Arab nationalist trends. For instance publications advocating for Arab awakening and independence were issued from the French capital by organizations of youth, students and academics, the first Arab congress was convened there in 1913, and some Arab leaders (e.g. those of the Comité Central Syrien) and journalists established in the city were believed to be on the payroll of the French government. Kaufman, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, quoted in Volume 1, p. 149.

¹⁸⁰ France, under the governments of Guy Mollet and then Bourgès-Maunoury, played a major role in the introduction of the nuclear weapon in the Middle East between 1957 and the early 1960s, in synergy with the development of its own nuclear program. In particular, France is believed to have assisted the secret construction of Israel’s nuclear plant in Dimona, in the Negev Desert, supplying a nuclear reactor, scientists and technicians. *Ibidem*.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 182. The construction of the Suez Canal was orchestrated by the French diplomat and entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps.

Chapter Four

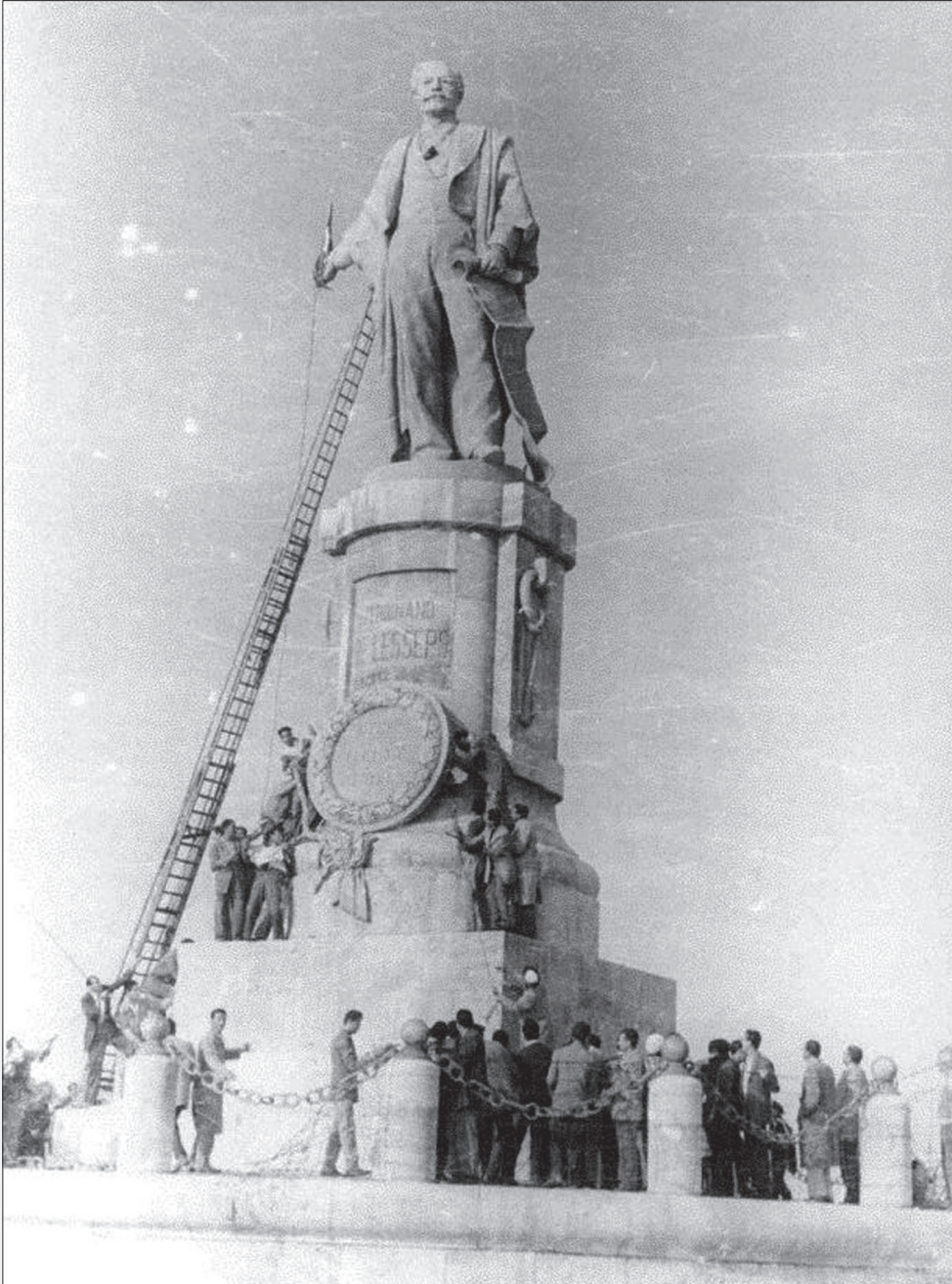
France's "Pro-Arab" Years: De Gaulle, Giscard, and Pompidou

The Aftermath of the Suez Debacle

The joint French-British-Israeli attack against Egypt turned out to be a stinging defeat which confronted France and Great Britain with the reality of their loss of influence in the region and the emergence of the United States as the new dominant player. Furthermore, by revealing in plain sight France's alliance with Israel, the Suez War seriously impaired its reputation in the Arab world, as did also its long-lasting imperialist war against Algeria's independence. It is precisely to solve the Algerian stalemate that in May 1958 the French lower house of parliament asked Colonel de Gaulle, who had distinguished himself during World War II by leading France's resistance forces against the Nazis, to take up the reins of the country. The new French president paid the utmost importance to foreign policy, making it his "*domaine réservé*" (reserved domain). For de Gaulle, the refusal of the United States to support French, British and Israeli troops in Egypt had proved once again that a nation's interests were best served by itself. This conviction, coupled with a strong antipathy towards the United States, translated into a refusal of taking side in the bipolar configuration of the Cold War, a desire to present "third world" nations with an alternative to the Washington-Moscow axis, and a diplomacy geared towards the objective of national independence which would lead to the decision of making France a nuclear power and withdrawing from the NATO.¹⁸³ On the Middle East file, de Gaulle's diplomacy would aim at reconciling France with the Arab world, which would also mean the adoption of a more balanced position than the overwhelmingly pro-Israeli stance of the various governments which had preceded him. The first measures he took in that sense consisted in establishing a strong presidential regime (the Fifth Republic) to stop the chronic governmental instability of the past and its permeability to external lobbying, and in bringing to a close the parallel informal diplomacy between the French and Israeli military establishments via the reinstatement of the preeminence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the sole "heir to [France's] old Muslim policy."¹⁸⁴ Complemented by the histori-

¹⁸³ Boniface, Pascal, "La France et le monde arabe", in Boniface Pascal, Billion Didier (eds.), *Les Défis du monde arabe*, IRIS, Paris, 2004.

¹⁸⁴ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*



Egyptians removing the statue of Lesseps to show their rejection of France after the Suez War.

cal decision to bring Algeria's colonization to an end in 1962, these steps would contribute to improving progressively France's image in the region.

However, de Gaulle's policy could not yet be qualified as "pro-Arab." In fact, some of the comments he made in that period seemed to indicate an intrinsic hostility towards the Arab and Muslim people.¹⁸⁵ A point in case was the interview he gave on 31 May 1956, when he declared: "What are the Arabs? The Arabs are a people who, since Mahomet's time, have never succeeded in building a state."¹⁸⁶ A year before, de Gaulle had also told the Israeli ambassador to France Yacob Tsur that in the Arab world "France [would] have to lean on any ethnic and religious minority to thwart the exclusive domination of the Muslim majority."¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, the French general had not hidden his sympathies for Israel, approving of France's expedition against Nasser, like the majority of his political party, and expressing in his meeting with Tsur his great admiration for Israel. The Israeli authorities had therefore warmly welcomed his arrival to the presidency, encouraged by the statement of the French ambassador in Tel Aviv, Pierre-Eugène Gilbert, that now Israel had "a friend much stronger and powerful than in the past."¹⁸⁸ And indeed, the Fourth Republic's diplomacy towards Israel was not fundamentally questioned during the first years of de Gaulle's mandate, as exemplified by the Elysée's efforts to facilitate the signing of agreements allowing the free access of Israeli consumption products in the nascent European common market, and by the maintenance of a high level of military cooperation with Israel, from the delivery of weapons to the transfer of technology, most notably in the nuclear field.¹⁸⁹ The diplomatic relations between the two countries remained also particularly cordial. Symbolically, it is under the presidency of de Gaulle that Ben-Gurion made his first official visits to France. In the first meeting between the two statesmen held in Paris on 13 June 1960, de Gaulle expressed his country's "admiration, affection, and trust [towards Israel]," adding that Ben-Gurion "personif[ied] the wonderful resurrection, rebirth, pride and prosperity of Israel," and was in his eyes "the greatest statesman of the century."¹⁹⁰ During the Israeli leader's second visit to France a year later, de Gaulle confirmed: "We want to assure you of our solidarity and friendship. We greet Israel, our friend and ally."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, quoted in Volume 1, p. 243.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, quoted p. 242.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, quoted in Volume 1, p. 13.

¹⁸⁹ Perhaps without De Gaulle knowing or with his silent approval. *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁰ Necker, Marc, *Intifada française? De l'importation du conflit israélo-palestinien*, Ellipses Marketing, Paris, 2012, p. 18.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in *Le Monde* of 8 June 1961. Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p. 29.

On the ground, those years witnessed a further weakening of France's position. Following the Suez Crisis, all the Arab countries except Lebanon had indeed cut their relations with Paris, obliging the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to revise its objectives downwards and adopt a policy of so-called "disengagement" revolving around two main ideas: first, the fact that although the existence of Israel should not be challenged, it was necessary to take into consideration "the extreme sensitivity of the Muslim world;" and second, the need to "renounce the illusion of a partial settlement" of the Palestinian issue even if the circumstances did not allow solving it as a whole.¹⁹² As a result, the French diplomacy had to limit itself to "cautiously and discretely [work] on the stabilization of the current situation, albeit unsatisfactory."¹⁹³ This passivity contributed to weakening France's stance on the question of Jerusalem. On the one hand, de Gaulle pursued the French tradition of advocating "an international regime ensuring the rights of Christendom,"¹⁹⁴ as he had stated in a press conference given on 17 November 1948. In that he echoed the consensus within his political party, the Rally of the French People (RFP), composed in majority of conservative Catholics worried about the fate of the holy sites and who adhered to the call of the Vatican to give Jerusalem an "international character."¹⁹⁵ For instance in April 1948, his close associate Gaston Palewski had proposed the constitution of an "international police force proceeding from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization"¹⁹⁶ to rescue the holy places from the devastating effects of the war. In October 1949, the RFP had also adopted a motion in favor of a "special status" for the holy sites guaranteeing "to all individuals and communities as well as places of worship, convents and pilgrimages the freedoms necessary to their access and maintenance," alongside the continued recognition of "the duties and traditions of France and the institutions attached to it."¹⁹⁷ However, as illustrated by the angry mob that raided the French consulate general in Jerusalem the day following the launch of the Suez military operation, the situation of the French in the city had become extremely difficult, and the interruption of the diplomatic relations with Transjordan rendered the objective of an international regime for Jerusalem even more unattainable than in the past.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, in an at-

¹⁹² Danino, *op. cit.*

¹⁹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p. 109. The authors remark however that after receiving the Israeli ambassador Yacob Tsur in April 1955, De Gaulle suggested that Israel should correct its borders, even at the price of a war, including in Jerusalem.

¹⁹⁵ Pope Pius XII, "In Multiplicibus Curis", 24 October 1948. Quoted in Farge, Elodie, *The Vatican and Jerusalem*, PASSIA Publications, Jerusalem, August 2012, p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p. 109.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

¹⁹⁸ Danino, *op. cit.*

tempt to put an end to the duality of diplomatic representations (in Amman and Jerusalem), King Hussein endeavored to undermine the position of foreign countries in the city, trying to abolish their religious protectorate (e.g. he managed to obtain from the local Christian communities the authorization to renovate the Holy Sepulcher Church) and the political and economic privileges enjoyed by their affiliated religious communities, in addition to suppressing foreign representatives' laissez-passer, among other measures.¹⁹⁹ France succeeded at least in maintaining its chancellery in the Old City, whereas its other diplomatic representations in the Hashemite Kingdom had been closed, so as to continue marking its opposition to the recognition of Jordanian rule over East Jerusalem. On the other hand, the Israelis' efforts to make foreign countries accept Jerusalem as their capital city started to pay off: although many still refused to transfer their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in 1956 they had begun to allow their diplomats to meet with Israeli officials in Jerusalem when they had to deal with important and urgent affairs, causing the progressive marginalization of the special liaison committee in Tel Aviv and its closure by Golda Meir in July 1962.²⁰⁰ Israel also achieved another symbolic victory with the use by French diplomats, initiated under the 4th Republic, of the concept of "manifestation of courtesy" in virtue of which they could attend the ceremonies organized by the Israeli president in Jerusalem.²⁰¹

Although on those occasions French representatives reiterated their country's willingness to internationalize the Holy City, and although France kept on condemning Israeli disrespect of international decisions on the issue at the UN,²⁰² its attempts to solve the question of the status of Jerusalem had clearly lost momentum in the face of the entrenchment of the situation on the ground.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibidem.*

²⁰¹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰² Such as in April 1961 when France voted in favor of a project of resolution asking Israel to comply with a verdict of the Armistice Commission denouncing a project to organize a military parade in West Jerusalem. Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

The Turning Point of the 1967 War

The June 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem from the Jordanians and its subsequent annexation, ten-fold enlargement and unification with West Jerusalem into a single unity under full Israeli control,²⁰³ contributed at least to give the status issue a renewed attention at the UN. France participated actively in the international condemnation of Israeli unlawful policies and practices in the city, voting on 4 July in favor of UNGA Resolution 2253 which called upon Israel to “rescind all measures taken [and] to desist forthwith, from taking any action which would alter the status of Jerusalem.” On 12 July, the head of the French Foreign Ministry’s European Department François Seydoux affirmed that his government could not recognize the Israeli decision to unify Jerusalem, and two days later France voted in favor of a project of resolution (A/RES/2254) deploring that Israel had not implemented Resolution 2253 and again requesting that it “immediately abstain from any action which would change the status of Jerusalem.” In the following months, Paris continued to reject any policy of *faits accomplis* carried out by the Israeli authorities, which among others proceeded to the dissolution of the Arab council of the city, to the replacement of local laws by Israeli ones, to the suppression of Jordanian tribunals and currency,²⁰⁴ and to the demolition of the historical Moroccan quarter in the Old City to facilitate the construction of an expanded Jewish quarter and a plaza in front of the Western Wall.²⁰⁵ For instance on 21 May 1968 France adopted UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 252 which reaffirmed that “the acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible,” considered that “all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, including expropriation of land and properties thereon, which tend to change the legal status of Jerusalem are invalid and cannot change that status,” and which renewed calls upon Israel “to rescind all such measures already taken and to desist forthwith from taking any further action which tends to change the status of Jerusalem.”

²⁰³ Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), “Jerusalem. Israeli Settlement Activities & Related Policies”, PASSIA Publications, Jerusalem, October 2011.

²⁰⁴ Levallois/Pommier, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁵ See Ricca, Simone, “Heritage, Nationalism and the Shifting Symbolism of the Wailing Wall”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, No. 151, March 2010, Paris, www.cairn.info/revue-archives-de-sciences-sociales-des-religions-2010-3-page-169.htm.

In fact, these firmer condemnations of the Israeli actions with regards to Jerusalem reflected a wider change of course in the French position on the Israeli-Palestinian issue following the Six-Day War. A year earlier, as the tension was growing between Israel and Egypt in the Gulf of Aqaba, General de Gaulle had vehemently warned Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban who was paying an official visit to France against warmongering: "Do not make war! Do not make war!" he told him. "In no case be those commencing hostilities!"²⁰⁶ On 2 June 1967, the French president had even authored a statement cautioning that "the state which would be the first to use weapons, wherever it may be, would have neither [his] approval nor, even more, [his] support."²⁰⁷ Consistently, on the very day that Israel started its military operations, he ordered an embargo on arms sales to the Middle East, a measure which in fact targeted only Israel. His condemnations became stronger after the conflict, going totally countercurrent to the general pro-Israeli inclinations of the French public opinion influenced by a Jewish community increasingly committed to Zionism after the repatriation of the "Pieds-Noirs" at the end of the colonization process (who included the more religious Sephardic Jews of the Maghreb), and relayed by media portraying the war as a new "Holocaust" perpetrated by fanatic Arabs against defenseless Israelis. De Gaulle, ahead of his time, was instead convinced that Israel, depicted by the Israeli propaganda as a defenseless "David," was in fact the "Goliath" of the situation, that it was much more powerful than its Arab opponents, and that its security was not truly in jeopardy.²⁰⁸ Thus on 21 June, the Elysée Palace issued an official statement "condemning the commencement of hostilities by Israel" and affirming that France did "not recognize any changes on the ground caused by the military action" – a position that would be reiterated at the UN on many instances, such as on 22 November 1967 with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 242. When the interpretation of that resolution was subject to controversy, Paris defended the French-language version calling for the "withdrawal of Israel armed forces *from the territories* occupied in the recent conflict," as opposed to the English-language wording preferred by Israel since it mentioned only a "withdrawal of Israel armed forces *from territories* occupied in the recent conflict."²⁰⁹ This profound change in France's policy was best illustrated by General de Gaulle's press conference of 27 November 1967, where he described the Jews as "an elite people, sure of themselves and domineering" (see

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 58.

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, quoted in Volume 2, p. 59.

²⁰⁸ To counter the strong influence of the pro-Israeli lobby in the French media, De Gaulle encouraged the establishment of the Association of French-Arab Solidarity (ASFA). *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁹ In the other UN official languages (Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese), the resolution has the same meaning as in the French text.

Box 4 below). Despite this controversial comment, in his speech de Gaulle was not only fair to both sides but also particularly clear-sighted, being one of the first statesmen to predict that the Israeli occupation and repression would generate resistance from the Palestinians, which would in turn be qualified as terrorism by Israel, in an endless spiral of violence and misery.

De Gaulle's Press Conference at the Elysée Palace - 27 November 1967

“The establishment of a Zionist homeland in Palestine and then, after the Second World War, the establishment of the State of Israel raised at the time a certain amount of fears. The question could be asked, and was indeed asked even among many Jews, whether the settlement of this community on a land acquired under more or less justifiable conditions, in the midst of Arab populations who were basically hostile, would not lead to continued, incessant frictions and conflicts. Some people even feared that the Jews, until then scattered about, but who were still what they had always been, that is an elite people, sure of themselves and domineering, would, once assembled again on the land of their ancient greatness, turn into a burning and conquering ambition. [...]

“The Franco-British Suez expedition had seen the emergence of a warrior State of Israel determined to increase its land area and boundaries. Later, the actions it had taken to double its population by encouraging the immigration of new elements had led us to believe that the territory it had acquired would soon prove insufficient and that, in order to enlarge it, it would seize on any opportunity that would present itself. This is the reason why the Fifth Republic had disengaged itself from the very special and close ties with Israel, established by the previous regime, and instead had applied itself to favoring detente in the Middle East. Obviously we had maintained cordial relations with the Government of Israel, and even continued to supply for its defense the weapons it asked to buy, while at the same time we were advising moderation. Finally, we had refused to give our official backing to its settling in a conquered district of Jerusalem, and had maintained our Embassy in Tel Aviv.

“Unfortunately a drama occurred. It was brought on by the very great and constant tension resulting from the scandalous fate of the refugees in Jordan, and also by the threat of destruction against Israel. On 22 May the Aqaba affair unfortunately created by Egypt would offer a pretext to those who wanted war. To avoid hostilities, on 24 May France had proposed to the other three Major Powers to jointly forbid both parties from initiating the fight. On 2 June, the French Government had officially declared that it would condemn whoever would take up arms first. I myself, on 24 May, had stated to Mr. Eban, Israel’s Foreign Minister, whom I saw in Paris: ‘If Israel is attacked we shall not let it be destroyed, but if you attack we shall condemn your action.’”

“Israel attacked, and reached its objectives in six days of fighting. Now it organizes itself on conquered territories, the occupation of which cannot go without oppression, repression, expulsions, while at the same time a resistance grows, which it regards as terrorism. Jerusalem should receive international status.”



Charles de Gaulle

The motivations of de Gaulle, who had once stated that “a state worth of this qualification has no friends, only interests,”²¹⁰ were probably more pragmatic than ethical, ranging from the desire to pursue economic interests in the region and ensure France’s supply of Arab oil, to the fear that tensions between the two Cold War blocks would increase in case of a war in the Middle East.²¹¹ In any case, the stance of the French president against Israel, its uniqueness at the time in the Western world marked instead by its complete alignment on the US policy of unconditional support for Israel, provided France with an unprecedented popularity among the Arab people. This affected durably the relations with Israel, especially with the extension of the sales embargo to all types of materials in January 1969 in protest against the Israeli attack against Beirut airport.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p. 23.

²¹¹ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

However, this detachment from the Israeli authorities did not mean a parallel rapprochement with the Palestinians.²¹² Indeed, the French authorities somewhat neglected the leaders of the Palestinian resistance – admittedly not fully established at the time – and considered the Palestinian question from the mere perspective of the refugee problems, ignoring the national aspirations of the Palestinian people to statehood. There was still no mention in the French official discourse of the political rights of the Palestinians, even less of their right to self-determination, and it was even reported that de Gaulle was not convinced that the Palestinian people formed a “nation” and were entitled to a state.²¹³

Pompidou and the Exordium of the “Palestinian Doctrine”

In fact it was under Georges Pompidou, who succeeded de Gaulle in June 1969, that France’s diplomacy became truly “pro-Arab” as the new French president, also a Gaullist, displayed greater audacity in the recognition of the Palestinian cause and set the first milestones of the French “Palestinian doctrine.”²¹⁴ Initially however, France continued to avoid subscribing officially to the principle of Palestinian self-determination, refraining from expressing its vote on various UN General Assembly resolutions which started evoking Palestinians as a people entitled to political rights instead of mere refugees.²¹⁵ And although Paris voted in favor of UNGA Resolution 2949 of 8 December 1972 recognizing that “respect for the rights of the Palestinians is an indispensable element in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East,” it abstained to vote five days later on Chapter E of UNGA Resolution 2963 which clearly recognized that “the problem of the Palestinian Arab refugees has arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights,” affirmed that “the people of Palestine are entitled to equal rights and self-determination,” and recognized that “full respect for and realization of the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine are indispensable for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.” Interestingly, when in that same period resolutions deploring modifications to the status of Jerusalem were put to a vote, France systematically gave its support – a lack of consistency which showed that the

²¹² *Ibidem*.

²¹³ According to Raymond Offroy in “Le général de Gaulle et le Mexique”, in *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, Fondation Charles de Gaulle, 1983. Mentioned by Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.* Volume 2, p. 87.

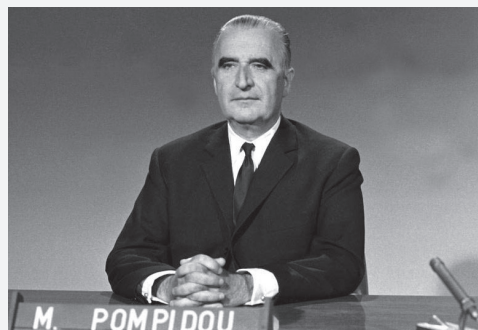
²¹⁴ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*. For instance, France abstained on UNGA Resolution 2535 B of 10 December 1969 which reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine, and on Resolutions 2672 C of 8 December 1970 and 2792 D of 6 December 1971 which recognized that Palestinians were entitled to equal rights and self-determination in accordance with the UN Charter.

issue of the Holy City remained a core principle of its policy on the subject of Palestine.

Nonetheless, as the Palestinian national movement started to structure itself and to become more powerful after Fatah took its lead, France began to pay major attention to Palestinian national demands and to their centrality in the resolution of the conflict.

Thus, during the deadly hostage-taking of the Munich Olympic Games in summer 1972, Pompidou denounced “horrible” acts but at the same time underlined that they could not be avoided without suppressing their causes, and that no settlement of the Middle East conflict could ignore the “Palestinian fact.”²¹⁶ This evolution reflected some change in the French public perception of the Palestinian question in the years following the 1967 War, which saw the emergence of organized groups of pro-Palestinian activists – mainly the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) – and some (still rare) mentions of the Palestinian cause in the media and political circles not only at the left of the political spectrum (the Communists were the first to highlight the Palestinian national dimension of the conflict) but also in more traditional milieu. Pompidou, even more than de Gaulle, believed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a worrying factor of destabilization in the bipolar world of the Cold War which needed an urgent solution. In his opinion, the only way forward was a preliminary agreement between the major powers (France, Britain, USSR and the USA) followed by pressure on the belligerents who, left alone, were not able to find a way out.²¹⁷ But as French efforts to convene a conference between those four proved unsuccessful, Pompidou decided to test another canal, the European one. His idea was to use the Franco-German reconciliation and the process of European integration as a model of conflict resolution.²¹⁸ The task was not easy though since the various European countries had very differing views on the issue of Palestine, generally more favorable to Israel. A first achievement for the French president was to manage to make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a priority of the European Economic Community (EEC)’s new intergovernmental consultation mechanism in



Georges Pompidou

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

²¹⁷ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²¹⁸ Dieckhoff, Alain, “Europe and the Arab World: The Difficult Dialogue”, in Greilsammer, Ilan/Weiler, Joseph H. (eds), *Europe and Israel: Troubled Neighbours*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988, p. 255-262.

the field of international affairs²¹⁹ by placing the issue at the top of the agenda of the first Foreign Affairs ministers' meeting held in Munich on 19 November 1970 (which officially launched the European Political Cooperation). Furthermore, whereas it had been decided on that occasion that each country would present a separate report on a specific aspect of the conflict, French diplomats insisted on the necessity to issue a common document. Their efforts were rewarded with the adoption on 13 May 1971 of the Schumann Paper, named after the French foreign minister at the time, which represented the first common European declaration on the conflict.²²⁰ Based on UN Resolution 242, the text reasserted the illegality of the acquisition of land by force, called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops to the 1967 borders, and upheld the right of refugees to either return or receive compensations. On the question of Jerusalem, the document recommended the administrative internationalization of the city and the postponement of any conclusive solution regarding the sovereignty of East Jerusalem, including the Old City. Although the report was subsequently disavowed by the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, it remained a success for the French diplomacy inasmuch as it adopted most of its own views on the subject.

This greater convergence of positions among the European states and the gradual erosion of the unreserved support for Israel from its traditional allies was illustrated a year later at the UNGA annual debate on the Middle East when all the EEC members except Denmark voted in favor of a resolution strongly critical of the Israeli authorities. Then on 8 December 1972 they unanimously supported the adoption of UNGA Resolution 2949 recognizing that "respect for the rights of the Palestinians is an indispensable element in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East." The 1973 War was another occasion for the French diplomacy to capitalize on this evolution and progress further towards the adoption of a common European diplomatic position on the conflict, despite the American and Israeli determination to prevent the Europeans from gaining any independent role. Although the first reactions to the Syrian-Egyptian offensive against Israel were disparate (the French one stood out, with Foreign Affairs Minister Michel Jobert declaring: "Does trying to go back home constitute an unexpected aggression?"²²¹), a meeting of the EEC ministers of Foreign Affairs was organized in Brussels on 6 November 1973 at the initiative of Paris

²¹⁹ Inaugurated with the adoption in 1970 of the Davignon Report which recommended that EEC member states endeavor to speak with a single voice on international affairs through the creation of an informal intergovernmental consultation mechanism.

²²⁰ Khader, *op. cit.*

²²¹ *Le Monde* of 9 October 1973. Quoted in Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

to adopt a common statement. The ensuing Brussels Declaration stated the need for Israel to end the territorial occupation which it had maintained since the 1967 War, called for the respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of every state in the area, and recognized that “in the establishment of a just and lasting peace account must be taken of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.” Further to the reassertion of these principles at the Copenhagen Summit of December 1973, Arab countries proposed to the EEC the instauration of an institutional mechanism allowing a permanent “Euro-Arab dialogue” to deal with common affairs. France played a driving role in the concretization of this proposal, which contributed for some time to crystallize a shared position on the question of Palestine between the two shores of the Mediterranean.²²²

Giscard d’Estaing and the Venice Declaration

Pompidou had no time to achieve more: he passed away in 1974 before completing the full term of his mandate. His successor, the centrist Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, gave major amplitude to France’s Arab policy. While he showed a desire to relax the relations with Israel, lifting the embargo in August 1974 and working on the project of the first visit to Israel of a French minister in office, he also developed significantly the economic cooperation with the Arab world and, more to the point, gave further substance to the “Palestinian doctrine” initiated under Pompidou.²²³ He was encouraged in that respect by the increased recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people on the international scene which resulted from the prestige the organization had gained from the 1973 October War, its concessions on the conception of the borders of the ambitious Palestinian state,²²⁴ and enhanced domestic legitimacy.²²⁵ The French government multiplied the statements ac-

²²² Khader, *op. cit.*

²²³ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²²⁴ With the entrenchment of the Israeli occupation and the expulsion of the Palestinian resistance from Jordan following the 1970 Black September confrontations, PLO leaders started reassessing the tactical achievability of the initial objective of a democratic state over the whole of historic Palestine. In June 1974, at its 12th session, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) adopted a Transitional Political Program which, although still rejecting UN Resolution 242, resolved to accept a separate Palestinian state in only some part of Palestine as an interim solution. Selim, Mohamed, “The Survival of a Non-State Actor: The Foreign Policy of the Palestine Liberation Organization”, in Korany, Bahgat/Dessouki, Ali E. Hillal, *The Foreign Policies of Arab States. The Challenge of Change*, Westview Publisher, 2nd edition, 1991.

²²⁵ In the 1970s, the PLO began focusing its attention on the development of the institutional infrastructure that would support the future Palestinian state, establishing a network of grassroots organizations responsible for both political mobilization and provision of community services not supplied by the Israeli occupier. This “institutional resistance” resulted in the development of a Palestinian “quasi-state” and contributed to reinforcing the supremacy of the PLO as the “single articulator of Palestinian aspirations” as evidenced by the sweeping victory of pro-PLO candidates in the April 1976 municipal elections. Cf. Rigby, Andrew, *Palestinian Resistance and Non-Violence*, PASSIA Publications, Jerusalem, 2010.

knowledging Palestinian rights to a nation and subsequently to self-determination. For instance on 31 May 1974, shortly after Giscard's election, a communiqué from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing satisfaction with the disengagement agreement reached between Israel and Syria reminded that "for a just and lasting peace in the region, any settlement will have to give a fair share to the aspirations of the Palestinian people." Even more significant were the words that the French president expressed during his first press conference on 24 October 1974, when he declared: "There can be a long-lasting peace only if the Palestinian issue is the object of a settlement. The international community recognized the existence of a Palestinian people, and what is the natural aspiration of a people? It is to have their own homeland."²²⁶ Although initially France still fell short of officially acknowledging the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, abstaining from voting on UNGA Resolution 3236 of November 1974 which recognized that right and formalized UN contacts with the PLO, it eventually did so on 23 January 1976 by voting in favor of a UNSC draft resolution (eventually vetoed by the United States) recognizing the "right of the Palestinians to establish an independent state in Palestine."

The French government also proceeded in its way towards recognition of the PLO, voting in favor of UNGA Resolution 3210 of 14 October 1974 inviting the organization to participate in the debates of the UNGA on the question of Palestine. A week later, the first encounter between a French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean Sauvagnargues, and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat took place in Beirut. On that occasion, Sauvagnargues addressed Arafat as "Mister President" and declared in the successive press release that the Palestinian leader had appeared to him as "realistic and moderate" and endowed with the "stature of a statesman."²²⁷ And despite the fact that the French authorities still refused to grant formal recognition to the PLO, abstaining from expressing their voice during the voting of resolution 3237 which gave the PLO the status of observer at the UNGA, these declarations from the highest level of the state were remarkable. They were accompanied by concrete measures such as the authorization given to the PLO to open an information office in the French capital in October 1975. Although deprived of diplomatic status (albeit enjoying immunity), the Paris liaison office and the regular relations between French and Palestinian senior officials which followed its establishment, alongside the French insistence as early as 1979 on the necessity to associate the PLO to the peace negotiations with Israel, were tantamount to a *de facto* recognition of the Palestinian national body.²²⁸

²²⁶ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 222.

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

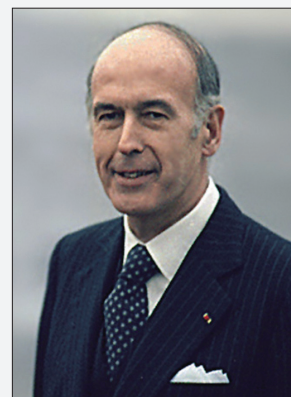
²²⁸ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

The culmination of this process took place on 3 March 1980 when President Giscard d'Estaing affirmed clearly his support for Palestinian self-determination, saying : “The problem of the Palestinians is not a problem of refugees, but that of a people who must be granted, in the framework of a just and lasting peace, its right to self-determination.”²²⁹ Two months later, on 13 June 1980, he managed to convince his European partners gathering in Venice to do likewise through a common statement which represented the strongest European political stand so far on the Israeli-Palestinian issue and Palestinians’ right to statehood.²³⁰ While reiterating the right to existence and security of all the states in the region, the landmark Venice Declaration stated:

A just solution must finally be found to the Palestinian problem, which is not simply one of refugees. The Palestinian people, which is conscious of existing as such, must be placed in a position, by an appropriate process defined within the framework of the comprehensive peace settlement, to exercise fully its right to self-determination.

In addition, the document emphasized that “the achievement of these objectives require[d] the involvement and support of all the parties concerned in the peace settlement” and that the PLO had to be associated in the negotiations, despite the vehement opposition of Israel. The European head of states and governments also shared the French insistence on the importance of reaching a “comprehensive solution,” as opposed to the American and Israeli efforts for a separate peace deal with Egypt at Camp David.

Regarding the issue of Jerusalem, the Venice Declaration restated the inadmissibility of “any unilateral initiative designed to change the status of Jerusalem” and the necessity that “any agreement on the city’s status should guarantee freedom of access for everyone to the holy places.” The French administration reasserted this position both on the ground – such as when it refused in December 1974 to be represented by its ambassador on the occasion of the inauguration in occupied East Jerusalem of the Israeli René Cassin High School²³¹ – and in international fora.



Valéry Giscard d'Estaing

²²⁹ Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²³⁰ A midway step had been reached at the London European Summit of 20 June 1977, where for the first time the notions of “Palestinian people” and its need for a “homeland” were mentioned.

²³¹ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

For instance Paris voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 476 which restated that “All legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.”²³² When a month later, on 30 July 1980, the Knesset challenged this warning by adopting the Basic Law “Jerusalem, Capital of Israel” which declared that “Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel” and that “Jerusalem is the seat of the President of the State, the Knesset, the Government and the Supreme Court,” marking a further step in the process of incorporation and formal annexation of the eastern part of the city, France voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 478 (adopted unanimously despite US abstention) “reaffirming again that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible” and expressing deep concern “over the enactment of a ‘basic law’ in the Israeli Knesset proclaiming a change in the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, with its implications for peace and security.” France and the other EEC members tried to transpose these condemnations into a more proactive diplomacy, giving mandate to the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Chris van der Klaauw at the beginning of 1981 to conduct an exploratory field mission aimed at collecting the views of the parties in conflict on four major topics including Jerusalem. In the subsequent recommendations, the Europeans advocated the internationalization of Jerusalem, a common administration of the city, and a special regime and status for the holy sites and the Old City.²³³ Yet the document, which raised a number of questions, fell on deaf ears.

In fact, in this period France’s political establishment started to take cognizance of the limitations of the country’s influence at the international level; limitations which were particularly visible on the Israeli-Palestinian file, comprehensively monopolized by Washington. Cracks also appeared on the domestic front, as for the first time under the Fifth Republic a question of foreign politics interfered openly in the electoral debate. Indeed, during those years the French intellectual climate was changing with the theorization and legitimization of the connected concepts of Jewish particularism and Jewish vote.²³⁴ Besides, although Palestinians started being represented as

²³² The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War governs the treatment of civilians during wartime and in territory under military occupation against abuses on the part of an occupying power, in particular by ensuring that civilians are not discriminated against, that they are protected against all forms of violence, and that despite occupation and war they are allowed to live as normal a life as possible.

²³³ “Le document établi par les Dix est pour l’essentiel un catalogue de questions”, *Le Monde*, 4 March 1981. Mentioned in Aoun, Elena, *Une (Im)puissance en (dé)construction. L’implication de l’Union européenne dans la recherche d’un règlement de paix au Moyen-Orient*, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris (PhD thesis), Paris, 2007.

²³⁴ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

victims and less as aggressors, the media continued to portray Israel in a favorable light and the creation of the Franco-Palestine Association in 1980 did not mitigate the lack of pro-Palestinian mobilization. On the other hand, the camp in favor of Israel was becoming more offensive, as illustrated by the new charter of the CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France [Representative Council of France’s Jewish Institutions]) issued in 1977 which declared plainly its ambition of acting as the lobbying arm of Israel in France.²³⁵ When the 1981 presidential elections campaign started, the idea of a protest vote against the incumbent, which first emerged during the municipal elections of 1977, was confirmed by the establishment of organizations aimed specifically at convincing the Jewish electorate to give its vote to the Socialist opposition (e.g. the associations *Renouveau Juif* [Jewish Renewal] and *Socialism and Judaism*²³⁶). This led Giscard, running for reelection, to retract partially from his previous position on the Palestinian question, as exemplified by his electoral debate with the Socialist candidate François Mitterrand, whom he accused of being favorable to a Palestinian state while himself was hostile to it. This turnaround seemed more than a mere electoral tactic though: after leaving the Elysée Palace, Giscard declared that he had committed mistakes on the file of French-Israeli relations, made a private trip to Jerusalem in May 1985 to meet with Israeli officials, and became Co-President of the *Groupe d’amitié parlementaire France-Israël* [France-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group]. For some analysts, this proved that his favorable stance towards the Palestinians had been motivated by mere financial determinants, which had acquired a growing importance following the two consecutive petroleum shocks and the fear that Arab countries may eventually close the oil tap. Others believed that during his mandate Giscard had been under the influence of the *Quai d’Orsay*, believed to be “pro-Arab.” In any case, and whatever the real reasons of France’s “Arabism” during those years, it would be given a strong re-assessment with the return of a Socialist at the head of the Republic.

²³⁵ *Ibidem*. See also Ghiles-Meilhac, Samuel, *Le CRIF: De la Résistance juive à la tentation du lobby. De 1943 à nos jours*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 2011.

²³⁶ Founded in 1978 by members of the Socialist Party, including Robert Badinter and Jacques Attali, “with the double mission of bringing the majority of Jewish voices in the Socialist’s pocket and initiate the party leaders to the charms of Israel.” Quoted by Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

These were observable and openly claimed examples of Jewish influence in French political life. That said, in France there is no population census by ethnic background and religious affiliation, so it is impossible to assess the reality of a “Jewish vote.” It may most probably be quite marginal considering that Jews count for less than 1% of the French population. The Jewish community itself is split on the question.

Chapter Five

Mitterrand, the Demise of the French “Arab Policy”

The Heir to the Fourth Republic

The election of François Mitterrand on 21 May 1981 was warmly welcomed in Israel, where he collected the support of 83.38% of the 3,406 French-Israeli voters.²³⁷ The accession to the French presidency of a Socialist reminded certainly Israelis and their leaders of the golden age of the French-Israeli relations under the Fourth Republic. Mitterrand’s sympathies for Israel had been patent since the beginning of his political career. Indeed, the man who had been tasked with announcing France’s *de facto* recognition of Israel on 19 January 1949 in his quality of spokesperson of the French government, had been later one of the founding members of the Parliamentary Committee for the France-Israel Alliance, which would become one of France’s main pro-Israeli lobbies, and had appeared very critical of de Gaulle’s oppositional stance during the 1967 War.²³⁸ At a personal level, Mitterrand had a strong interest in the history of the Bible and therefore in the land where Christianity and Judaism were born. Like other politicians of his generation, he established a “natural equivalence between Israel and the Holy Land of Palestine.”²³⁹ He was also attracted by the socialist dimension of the Zionist project (even sending his son to live in a kibbutz for a few months in 1971²⁴⁰), and depreciated any criticism against it, like in November 1975 when he had declared that the UNGA vote equating Zionism with racism deserved only “contempt.”²⁴¹ Moreover, in the framework of the cooperation established between the French Socialist Party and the Israeli Labor party, he had developed friendly relationships with several Israeli leaders, including Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan, and Menachem Begin. Golda Meir, in particular, had his favors; she had left such a strong impression on him after their first meeting in Israel in 1972 that he had subsequently declared to the Egyptian President Sadat to be “the per-

²³⁷ Necker, *op. cit.*

²³⁸ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²³⁹ Filiu, Jean-Pierre, "Mitterrand et la Palestine", interview, Institut François Mitterrand, 24 April 2006, <http://www.mitterrand.org/Mitterrand-et-la-Palestine.html>.

²⁴⁰ Necker, *op. cit.*

²⁴¹ Quoted in Filiu, Jean-Pierre, *Mitterrand et la Palestine. L'ami d'Israël qui sauva par trois fois Yasser Arafat*, Fayard, Paris, 2005, p. 46.

sonal friend of Golda.”²⁴² Mitterrand had also used actively the “Israeli card” for or vote-catching purposes, contributing to import the Israeli-Palestinian issue into domestic politics during that period. Thus in March 1972 he had declared ahead of a congress of the Israeli Labor party in Israel: “If we come to power, you can be certain that we will be faithful friends of Israel, both as socialists and as French citizens.”²⁴³ Then during the 1981 electoral race, he openly encouraged the campaign for the protest vote against Giscard’s Middle East policy, hammering his desire to make Israel the destination of his first presidential trip, insisting on his approval of the Camp David peace process, and affirming his opposition to the Arab commercial boycott of Israel which he saw as an “unjust discrimination.”²⁴⁴ Not surprisingly then, Prime Minister Begin hailed the election of Israel’s “friend, great friend François Mitterrand,” declaring: “For seven years we have been suffering from a unilateral policy, today with Mitterrand we hope that the alliance between France and Israel will be renewed.”²⁴⁵

His expectations would not be disappointed, as the French president totally reversed his predecessors’ conception of the Middle East peace process, acting in support for the separate negotiations between Israel and Egypt, and bringing his European partners in his wake.²⁴⁶ In fact, the new French administration, again in opposition with the past, appeared keen to stop any independent European initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian file. This renouncement was made explicit by the French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson during a visit to Israel on 7 December 1981, when he declared: “There will not be, as long as we are in power, any European project or initiative,” adding “the Venice declaration of principles is no longer topical.”²⁴⁷ Mitterrand’s pro-Israel stance during those years was also manifest in his leniency toward Israeli aggressions on his neighbors, including on the occasion of the bombing in June 1981 of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq despite being installed by France and causing the death of a French technician, or further to the Israeli raid of Beirut in July 1981 and the annexation of the Golan Heights in December of that year. On the contrary, François Mitterrand was eager to assert in person his support for Israel, making shortly after, in March 1982, the first official visit of a sitting French president to the

²⁴² Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 273.

²⁴³ Quoted in Filiu, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 293.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 289.

²⁴⁶ This resulted among others in the decision taken by the European Council of Ministers in London in November 1981 to endorse the participation of France, Britain, Italy and the Netherlands in a multinational observation force in the Sinai under US command as part of the Camp David Agreement. Khader, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, pp. 302-303.

country. Despite some appearance of balance with a simultaneous recognition of the rights of both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, to live in peace, his address at the Knesset was unmistakably in favor of the former.²⁴⁸ For instance, Mitterrand failed to condemn any Israeli violations of Palestinian rights, even avoiding carefully the use of the word “occupation,” relegated the PLO to the role of representatives of the mere “combatants” (as opposed to the Palestinian people as a whole), and denied it the possibility to sit at the negotiating table “as long as it denies the most essential for Israel, that is its right to exist and the means to ensure its security.”²⁴⁹ As for Palestinians’ political rights, they were summarized in the shortest and most imprecise manner: “Dialogue implies that each party can achieve its right, which, for the Palestinians like for others, can mean a state when the time has come.”²⁵⁰



François Mitterrand at the Knesset, March 1982

²⁴⁸ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁵⁰ Khader, *op. cit.*

Troubling in his Knesset speech was also his reference to Jerusalem. Not only did Mitterrand miss the opportunity to reassert clearly the opposition of France to Israel's illegal annexation of the city, but the only reference he made to Jerusalem was formulated in terms compatible with the Israelis' pretention to consider it as their "eternal" and "undivided" capital, describing the place as a "universal" city where "inevitably one day the alienated brothers will be reunited."²⁵¹ The Israeli officials were particularly grateful, with Shimon Peres later congratulating the French president for having avoided to "refer to Jerusalem as an Arab city or a city which must expect division."²⁵² In fact, Mitterrand saw Jerusalem, which he had visited on many occasions, essentially in a historically biblical light, and seemed to adopt Israeli views on the subject. As recalled by J.-P. Filiu, he had been quite affected when during the summer 1949, on a trip to Israel from Amman, he had been constrained to stay in the eastern part of the city under Jordanian control, unable to reach Israel which he had perceived more than ever as "under siege."²⁵³ Thus, he was quite reticent about the plan of Saudi Crown Prince Fahd Ibn Abdul-Aziz of 7 August 1981 which asked Israel to withdraw from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Mitterrand expressed reservations not only on the future borders of the Palestinian state, but also on the establishment of its capital in Jerusalem.²⁵⁴ Instead, he seemed to accredit the "Jordanian option" advanced by the Israeli right, according to which a state for Palestinians was already formed in Jordan, and he was reported to believe that it was possible to solve the question of Jerusalem by making an arrangement with the Saudis and Hashemites on an extra-territoriality of the Haram Ash-Sharif.²⁵⁵

The Reluctant Continuation of the Palestinian Doctrine

Mitterrand's presidential visit to Jerusalem left a strong impression on Israeli supporters worldwide, as illustrated by the Simon Wiesenthal Award he received from 35 Jewish American personalities in May 1984 "in gratitude for his constant friendship for the Jewish people and his support for the State of Israel, demonstrated by his historical visit to Jerusalem, sacred and eternal

²⁵¹ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁵² *Ibidem*, quoted in Volume 2, p. 318.

²⁵³ Filiu, Jean-Pierre, "Mitterrand et la Palestine", interview, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁴ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

centre of the Jewish people.”²⁵⁶ The enthusiasm was lesser among Palestinians, whom he did not even bother to meet during his stay. In fact, in addition to a lack of personal interest in the Arab world, Mitterrand’s few past encounters with Palestinians had left him with mixed feelings. Although he is still referred to as the first French politician to meet with Yasser Arafat in January 1974 in Cairo, the meeting had actually taken place without his prior consent and had made him feel particularly uneasy.²⁵⁷ Similarly, his encounter with West Bank mayors Fahd Kawasmeh and Muhammad Melhem as well as with the deputy director of the PLO office in Paris, Fadel Dani, had given him a bad impression, as he had acquired the conviction that these men refused the existence of Israel. Notwithstanding, and despite his personal bias for Israel, the basics of his predecessors’ “Palestinian doctrine” were somewhat preserved during his two presidential mandates due to the evolution of his own political group on the issue of Palestine²⁵⁸ and, more importantly, to the necessity of maintaining French commercial interests in the Arab world.²⁵⁹ This last consideration ultimately influenced the choice as ministers of Foreign Affairs of two men, Claude Cheysson and Roland Dumas, known for their knowledge of the region and the Palestinian file in particular. Both contributed to guarantee some semblance of continuity with the past, which took on the form of further recognition of the idea of a Palestinian state as well as legitimization of the PLO. For instance, in his first presidential speech on France’s international policy, Mitterrand stated that it was “normal that the Palestinians possess a homeland where they [would] build state structures of their choice.”²⁶⁰ His years in exercise also witnessed some developments regarding France’s relations with the PLO, including the upgrade of the organization’s liaison office to the status of “General Delegation of Palestine” in 1989.²⁶¹ Moreover, France was believed to play a crucial role in “rescuing”²⁶² two consecutive times the *fedayin* and their leader Arafat, first in August 1982 to allow their evacuation from Beirut during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and then in December 1983 when the Palestinian resistance found itself besieged by both the Israeli marine and the Syrian army in Tripoli. The final touch to this progressive legitimization of the PLO was the official invitation of Yasser Arafat to Paris on 2 May 1989, Mitterrand’s third “po-

²⁵⁶ Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁵⁷ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁸ As illustrated by the 1972 joint political program of the Socialist and Communist parties recognizing “the national rights of the Arab people of Palestine.”

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.* Volume 2, p. 306.

²⁶¹ Which meant that, in addition to diplomatic immunity, the PLO representation started enjoying fiscal and custom advantages. Filiu, *op. cit.*

²⁶² *Ibidem.*

litical rescue” of the Palestinian leader according to Filiu, who interpreted the event as a way for the French president to reward the political courage of Arafat who had just accomplished the historical gesture of recognizing the state of Israel and renouncing terrorism – first at the 19th meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Algiers in 1988 and then at the UNGA in Geneva.²⁶³



Arafat and Mitterrand at the Elysée, July 1994

²⁶³ During the 19th meeting of the Palestinian National Council (Algiers, 12-15 November 1988), the PLO proclaimed the State of Palestine, reaffirmed its condemnation of terrorism and eventually recognized UN Resolutions 242, 338 and 181, thus *de facto* acknowledging the existence of Israel. Chairman Arafat repeated the content of that declaration on 13 December 1988 in front of the UNGA in Geneva: “The PLO will seek a comprehensive settlement among the parties concerned in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the State of Palestine, Israel, and other neighbors, within the framework of the international conference for peace in the Middle East on the basis of resolutions 242 and 338 [...], and respect the right to exist in peace and security for all.” As Washington was still unsatisfied with this formulation, Arafat called a press conference the following day where he mentioned explicitly “the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security, including the State of Palestine, Israel, and their neighbors,” and “renounced” rather than “condemned” all forms of terrorism. Washington successively agreed to engage in dialogue with the PLO. See, for example, *Documents on Palestine, Vol. IV (1987-1994)*, Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2007.

Nevertheless, as announced in his Knesset address, Mitterrand would always make the objectives of the establishment of a Palestinian state and recognition of the PLO conditional upon the prior acceptance of Israel's right to exist. Besides, he would constantly refuse to recognize the Palestinian organization as more than the representative of the Palestinian "combatants."²⁶⁴ According to F. Mardam-Bey and S. Kassir, even the historical gesture of receiving Arafat in Paris did not derive from a real willingness to back the Palestinian leader but from more circumstantial considerations. Indeed, the French president had consistently refused Arafat's insistent requests to be invited officially at the Elysée Palace, and it was only after Washington itself announced its readiness to open a dialogue with the PLO following Arafat's Geneva declarations that Mitterrand had agreed at last. For these authors, the "rescue" of the PLO leader was also probably motivated by the need to make up for the role that France had been playing in the Lebanon war during those years. Although the French assistance to the *fedayin* had prompted Arafat to upgrade his qualification of France from "friend country" to "brother country," in reality the French president's position before and during the conflict had been particularly ambiguous. In addition to not objecting to Israel's plans of invasion of south Lebanon, which he had reportedly been informed of during his visit to Jerusalem,²⁶⁵ his first public reaction to the Israeli offensive was quite indulgent, declaring that he "continue[d] to feel the strong right of the people of Israel to live, and to live in peace and not under constant threat."²⁶⁶ Afterwards, the alignment of Paris on the US-Israeli plan to impose a friendly regime in Lebanon, alongside its involvement at the side of the Gemayel regime and the raid of the French aviation on Baalbek in November 1983, had further impaired France's image in its former "zone of influence," necessitating reparation by acting in favor of Arafat.²⁶⁷ The fact remains that when the PLO chairman's visit in the French capital eventually took place, Mitterrand endeavored to down play its symbolic importance via various protocol arrangements,²⁶⁸ and put heavy pressure to make him amend the Palestinian National Charter so that it reflect the new position expressed in Geneva. Eventually, Arafat submitted to his host's request, and announced in a live interview for the French television that the covenant was "*caduque*" [null and void].

²⁶⁴ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁵ Mardam-Bey and Kassir report that on that occasion Israeli leaders had told Mitterrand about their plan to launch a military operation in Lebanon, and the French president had not attempted to prevent them, seeming to agree on the stated objective of a ground offensive in Lebanese territories within 40 km from the southern border.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 329.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

²⁶⁸ For instance, although the red carpet was rolled out to welcome Arafat at the airport, he did not enjoy the honors of the Republican Guard and the French pennant was not displayed on the car transporting him to the Presidential Palace, only the Palestinian one was present and after much insistence on behalf of the Palestinian delegation.

Mitterrand's "Balance" as France's New Political Paragon

Following the Lebanon intervention, Mitterrand's diplomacy in the Middle East seemed to renounce any active role, staying mostly in the shadow of the United States. Further, France's eventual decision to join the American-led international coalition against Baghdad in January 1991 greatly tarnished its image in the region. Like Arafat, the Arab street could not miss the double standard of the West attacking Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait but doing nothing to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine – a feeling strengthened by Saddam Hussein's theory of "linkage" according to which any tension in the Middle East was intrinsically connected to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. In fact, critics came also from the Israeli side, almost unanimously bellicose and extremely displeased by the French initial – and unsuccessful – attempts to prevent the war against Iraq, which they felt was directly threatening the existence of Israel. In that period, France lost therefore any possibility of assuming an influential role with both sides of the conflict.²⁶⁹ This marginalization appeared in plain sight at the 1991 Madrid Conference, which illustrated the new world order resulting from the Second Gulf War and the fall of the Soviet Union with the consecration of the US as the unique world "superpower." While the Europeans as a whole were merely given the status of "observers" and were constrained to the sole responsibility that the Israelis authorized them to play, that is economic assistance and development aid, France was not much better served. Although it had played an important part in convening the conference, its representatives were only granted a seat in the guiding committee in charge of coordinating the bilateral and multilateral negotiations and tasked with following-up on the question of family reunification.²⁷⁰

The burial of the traditional French "Arab policy" was confirmed in March 1991 by Mitterrand's Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, who in a *Le Monde* newspaper interview declared that it had only been "a succession of illusions."²⁷¹ Paradoxically, although Mitterrand's legacy on the Israeli-Palestinian file would leave the two parties with mixed feelings (the Israelis would be particularly shocked by revelations of his close links with the general secretary of the collaborationist Vichy police René Bousquet²⁷²), it is still praised by many today as an inspirational model of equilibrium, and Mitterrand's Knesset address, despite its bias, has become "the new

²⁶⁹ Necker, *op. cit.*

²⁷⁰ Aeschmann, Eric/Boltanski, Christophe, *Chirac d'Arabie : Les mirages d'une politique française*, Grasset, Paris, 2006.

²⁷¹ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 444.

²⁷² Péan, Pierre, *Une jeunesse française. François Mitterrand, 1934-1947*, Fayard, Paris, 1994.

political charter of France on the conflict.”²⁷³ Similarly, whatever Mitterrand’s personal beliefs on Jerusalem, the position adopted on the matter by his government after the Oslo Declaration of Principles of 1993 – when it was agreed that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would include the resolution of the final status issue – would be consistently upheld by his successors, regardless of their political affiliation. This stance was best summarized by his Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé on January 1994:

France, in the course of time and under diverse governments, has never recognized the *fait accompli* of the annexation and proclamation of Jerusalem as capital of Israel. The issue of the Holy City must be solved in the framework of a global settlement. This is actually dictated by the Oslo declaration. The free access to the city of Jerusalem and in particular the rights of the faithful of the three monotheistic religions to exercise their cult freely must be guaranteed. Pending this global settlement, without which there will be no definitive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, we hope that no new initiative will be taken to create an irreversible *fait accompli*.²⁷⁴

The futility of this “hope” would appear increasingly obvious, as Israel’s policies aimed at strengthening its grip on Jerusalem would continue unabated, starting with the attempt of inverting the demographic balance in its favor as bluntly put by the Israeli municipality mayor Teddy Kollek in October 1990, when he declared: “The solution consists in settling as many new immigrants as possible in Jerusalem, and to make it a predominantly Jewish city. In this manner they will eventually understand that Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel.”²⁷⁵ Many more attempts at “Judaizing” the city and rendering impracticable any Palestinian claim over East Jerusalem would come in the following years – from the use of ideological archeological excavations to the building of the separation barrier physically cutting the city from its Palestinian environment – and the reaction of the French authorities would largely fail to rise to the challenge.

²⁷³ Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Levallois/Pommier, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, quoted p. 114.

Chapter Six

Chirac, the Diplomacy of Inconstancy

*The “Pro-Arab Philosemit”*²⁷⁶

In 1995, after 14 years of Socialism, the French people called back to power a follower of Gaullism: Jacques Chirac. The new president repeatedly emphasized his belonging to the lineage of the late general, especially with regards to France’s diplomacy in the Middle East. This was prominently illustrated by the speech he gave in Cairo in April 1996, when he proclaimed his ambition to make “France’s Arab policy [...] an essential dimension of its foreign policy,” and to give it “a new impetus, in accordance with the vision of its initiator, General de Gaulle.” However Chirac’s legacy in the region would be far distant from that of his role model, tarnished by inconsistency, excesses and gaffes stemming from political opportunism and a desire to please too many and contradictory interests at the same time.²⁷⁷ The premise was encouraging though. Indeed Jacques Chirac, fascinated by foreign civilizations²⁷⁸ and a strong advocate of the dialogue between cultures at a time dominated by the Bush administration’s embrace of the “clash of civilizations” theory, had a longstanding cultural interest in the Arab world. Furthermore, he had developed early in his political career a good knowledge of the region’s politics and leaders. Indeed, as prime minister of Mitterrand’s “cohabitation” government in the mid-1970s, he had made France’s cooperation with the Arab world a priority, especially in the military field.²⁷⁹ In that framework he had established close ties with a number of Arab rulers, including controversial ones such as the late Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, his son and successor Bashar, and the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.²⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Chirac failed to capitalize on this special relation with the Arab world to promote a constructive diplomacy, especially as far as the Israeli-Palestinian file was concerned. In fact, in addition to nurturing a real fascination for the Jewish culture as part of his multiculturalism, Chirac was extremely aware of the weight of the Jewish electorate

²⁷⁶ Expression of former Israeli ambassador to France and historian Elie Barnavi. Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁷⁷ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.* His career was also marred by a series of political scandals still pending in French courts today.

²⁷⁸ As symbolized by the Quai Branly Museum of indigenous arts which he established in Paris in 2006.

²⁷⁹ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁰ For instance, due mainly to the friendship between Chirac and Hussein, France became Iraq’s chief trade partner and was commissioned to build the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor (nicknamed “Ochirac” by Israelis). Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

in France and of the community's sensitivity to the question of Israel.²⁸¹ These electioneering considerations made him play right through the "bet of communitarianism"²⁸² in the city of Paris of which he had become mayor in March 1977, funding generously Jewish associations, places of worship, schools and kindergartens. These special attentions for Paris' Jews were rewarded during the presidential campaign of 1981, when the rabbi of the French Jewish Lubavitch sect explicitly called to vote for him.

In parallel, Jacques Chirac made determined efforts to erase the pro-Arab image of his debut. Thus in his first address of general policy as prime minister on 9 April 1986, he avoided mentioning the PLO and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, only referring to their "legitimate rights."²⁸³ He was also careful to keep his distance from the Palestinian leadership, refusing consistently to meet Yasser Arafat, whom he called a "terrorist" and a "thug."²⁸⁴ For instance, when in 1989 Arafat made his first official visit to Paris, Chirac deserted the French capital, and when he was eventually compelled to meet him in October 1993 on the occasion of a reception given by Mitterrand at the Paris municipality, Chirac remained cold and aloof, even provoking the new Chairman of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) by overtly regretting the absence in his delegation of Faisal Husseini, Arafat's rival.²⁸⁵ The French president hammered home the message in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* dated 15 August 1986:

There is no doubt that I will never do anything which could harm Israel, I stand in solidarity with this country and its values [...] I am not in favor of an independent Palestinian state [...]; I think that the issue can be settled in the framework of a solution negotiated with Jordan [...]. If I have never met Arafat, it is perhaps not a mere coincidence. I am one of the rare statesmen to reject the principle that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people [...]. I heard on the radio one morning that the PLO had opened an office in Paris and I was very unhappy about it [...].²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.* He had experienced this phenomenon firsthand during the 1977 municipal elections by witnessing the protest vote against the Middle East policy of Giscard d'Estaing which contributed to the loss by his party of the 3rd *arrondissement* of Paris, where a strong Jewish population lived.

²⁸² Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

²⁸³ Quoted in Mardam-Bey/Kassir, *op. cit.*, Volume 2, p. 402.

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

²⁸⁵ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 167. In this interview he also denied his ties with Saddam Hussein and his responsibility in the signing of a controversial contract of nuclear cooperation with Iraq, whereas he had taken the initiative of the project.

Following the anger provoked in the Arab world by these words, Chirac promptly retracted his declaration.

Deep inside him though, Jacques Chirac seemed sensitive to the plight of the Palestinian people and to share their anger and frustration. His private secretary when he was mayor, Bernard Billaud, affirmed that “although his official position was not to support a Palestinian state, in secret he did back it.”²⁸⁷ To corroborate this conviction, Billaud reminded that in 1980, despite the political risks vis-à-vis the French Jewish community, Chirac had met with Fatah mayor Abdul Jawad Saleh, expelled by Israel from the West Bank like most of the mayors elected in the Palestinian 1976 local elections. Although the meeting was supposed to be kept undisclosed, the event was leaked and provoked furious reactions from French supporters of Israel, constraining Chirac to justify himself in front of the Consistory (the Jews’ representative body). In the immediate aftermath, he confided to Billaud: “By keeping on compounding demands and intolerance, the Jews will resuscitate anti-Semitism and Israel may someday be thrown back into the sea. Their policy is irresponsible. I am frankly starting to find their behavior insufferable.”²⁸⁸ He privately expressed his disapproval of Israeli policy several times during this period, such as on the occasion of the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981, which he qualified as an “act of piracy.”²⁸⁹ He dared express more publicly his thoughts in an interview given in November 1986 to *The Washington Times*, in which he cast blame upon Israeli leaders:

They are upset when a bomb explodes at the Wailing Wall but they seem to forget that what the Arabs see is that Israel shells Palestinian camps and kills and mutilates all sorts of innocent people. [Israelis] call it retaliation [...] So when [the Arabs] see Western countries retaliate against Libya or Syria [...] for terrorism acts, they question the West’s motivations because themselves have been for many years victims of large-scale terrorism.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁹⁰ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

“Chirac Liberated Jerusalem!”

Once elected, perhaps because he feared to a lesser extent the possibility of sanctions from the Jewish electorate, Chirac gave further expression to these inner feelings. He first operated a strong rapprochement with Yasser Arafat, initiated at the Anti-Terrorism Summit of March 1996²⁹¹ when he managed to avoid the cancelation of Arafat’s meeting with Bill Clinton, to the joy of the former who exulted: “You are not President Chirac, you are Doctor Chirac!”²⁹² A great complicity ensued between the two men, which led to a desire to coordinate their positions on the peace process (during the over 30 meetings they would hold throughout their career). This somersault took a spectacular turn during Chirac’s first official visit to the Middle East as president of the Republic in October 1996, which nearly caused a diplomatic incident with the Israeli authorities. He began his tour of the region with Syria, where he gave a speech clearly asserting France’s support for a Palestinian state and calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. Then, pursuing his trip to Israel, Chirac canceled his speech at the Knesset (perhaps mainly to distinguish himself from his rival Mitterrand²⁹³), preferring to give his address at the Israel Institute of Technology “Technion” in Haifa. There, he declared that although any form of violence and terrorism against the people of Israel was unacceptable,

Security cannot be guaranteed by force. If one’s word is not kept, if agreements reached are not adhered to, there will be no peace. And if there is no peace, there will be no security. [...] As long as the Palestinians are not able to be in charge of their own affairs, as long as they are not entitled to the dignity enjoyed by all other peoples, as long as they have to make do with a second-class collective existence, frustrations and resentment will persist. And we all know the bitter fruits they produce. [...] Such is the price of security.

²⁹¹ Convened in March 1996 in the Egyptian city of Sharm Ash-Sheikh by US President Clinton, the so-called Summit of Peacemakers aimed at enhancing the peace process, promoting security and ending terrorism. It was boycotted by Syria and Lebanon on the account that by focusing on terrorism it contributed to center the peace process on security issues as desired by Israel. In fact the summit was believed to avoid Shimon Peres an electoral defeat when, after an unprecedented series of attacks, Israelis seemed ready to elect his rightist rival Netanyahu and freeze the Oslo agreements. Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

²⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

²⁹³ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

Reaching Jerusalem on 22 October 1996, the French president made another strong gesture by walking through the streets of the Old City and going on a walkabout with its Palestinian residents. In order to avoid any legitimization of the Israeli occupation of the city, he refused to be accompanied by any Israeli representatives, using the subterfuge of giving his visit a private character, and demanded discreet security measures. Notwithstanding, the Israeli security was omnipresent, preventing the crowds from approaching him closely, thereby ruining his pleasure of crowd-mingling. He grumbled: “This situation is unacceptable [...] This is an attitude which explains many things,”²⁹⁴ adding “This is not a democracy. It won’t have any result.”²⁹⁵ When a French journalist was pushed bluntly by security officers, his irritation turned into a real fit of anger. He exclaimed: “Do you want me to return to my plane and go back to France immediately? This is not security, this is pure provocation!”²⁹⁶ Then, after having to renounce the visit of the Haram Ash-Sharif out of fear of bringing Israeli soldiers in his wake as it had happened a few minutes before in the Holy Sepulcher Church (having been warned by the PLO delegate to France Leila Shahid that “it could provoke a massacre”²⁹⁷), he ordered to phone the Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu to protest that this was intolerable. Eventually, when he was informed that Israeli sharpshooters had been posted inside the Church of Saint Anne, a French property where he was expected to address the Palestinian Christian community, Chirac exploded: “I don’t want armed people in France!”²⁹⁸ His words, which prompted the withdrawal of the Israeli soldiers, were welcomed by Palestinian hoorays and exclamations of “Chirac liberated Jerusalem!”²⁹⁹ When he then headed to Ramallah to address the new Palestinian Legislative Council – being the first foreign head of state to do so – he was welcomed as a hero by cheering crowds, and newspapers even reported stories of parents giving their new-born babies the name of “Jakchirac” in honor of the man they saw as the only Western leader daring to stand up against Israel. Chirac’s popularity sky-rocketed,³⁰⁰ and the episode contributed undeniably to restore the image of France in the Arab world.

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

²⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

²⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

³⁰⁰ A long-lasting popularity: a survey conducted in six Arab countries in May 2004, in the aftermath of the French opposition to the 2003 Western intervention in Iraq, found Chirac at the top of the most popular world leaders list in Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, in a tie with Nasser, and at the third position in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.



Jacques Chirac in the Old City of Jerusalem, October 1996 © Jim Hollander (AF)

However, Chirac was no Salah Ad-Din liberating Jerusalem from the Crusaders. On the one hand, as he did in front of Palestinian legislators, the French president continued to condemn “changes in [Jerusalem’s] *status quo*” and to remind that “a compromised solution will have to take into account the aspirations and the rights of all the concerned parties.” Asked in the following press conference to specify his position on the status of the city, he declared:

Jerusalem is a very sensitive issue in the settlement of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. When matters are very complex, I think that one must try to be simple. First, there is currently an international status, an international agreement which must be respected by all as long as it has not been amended. Second, Jerusalem is a city with a particularity, it is the city of the three religions, thrice holy, and in my opinion, any Muslim, any Jew, any Christian must be able to have free access to the city and be respected there. [...] Third, there is a political problem which was mentioned at the time of the Oslo agreements when it was decided that negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis would include finding a solution to the future of

Jerusalem. I do not want, of course, to prejudge what this future will be. What I know is that, as agreed in Oslo, Palestinians and Israelis must, as soon as the time has come, and despite the difficulties, formulate together a new status for Jerusalem.

Yet, on the other hand, Chirac's acute understanding of the extreme political sensitivity of the question of Jerusalem, together with his typical desire to satisfy all sides, made his position on the issue somewhat inconsistent. For instance in 1978, as mayor of Paris, he had let himself be convinced to extend an invitation to the Israeli mayor of Jerusalem Teddy Kollek, who was trying to develop relations with world capitals as part of his bid to secure international legitimization of Israeli sovereignty over the city. As his decision had provoked a strong backlash from Arab embassies in Paris, which saw the visit as a way to accept the annexation of East Jerusalem, Chirac had tried to justify himself by declaring that he had been given no choice, and had promised to issue a communiqué stating that the meeting did not amount to an approval of the changes in the status of the city. Nevertheless, as he had faced in turn the discontent of the Jewish community, the final statement had been convoluted and failed to condemn the Israeli illegal *faits accomplis* in the city.³⁰¹ Even during the 1996 Old City incident, which had him praised by Palestinians as the savior of Jerusalem, Chirac's stance on the issue had appeared quite ambiguous. In the aftermath, he had tried to appease the situation by asking his Foreign Minister Hervé de Charrette "to abstain from coming [to East Jerusalem] so as not to cause further problems"³⁰² since a European rule dictated that the head of diplomacy of a European state in visit to Jerusalem had to go to the Orient House, the headquarters of the PLO in the city.³⁰³ In his stead, to avoid as well upsetting Palestinian leaders, Chirac decided to send his Secretary of State in charge of health, Henri Gaymard, in a visit which could be interpreted as mere medical cooperation.³⁰⁴ On this occasion, Gaymard declared in front of the Palestinian officials that "the meaning of [his] visit [was] to say

³⁰¹ The statement specified that the visit was organized "in the framework of the relations that Paris intend[ed] to establish with various foreign cities to develop its international action," that it "should not be interpreted as the expression of the position of Paris' mayor on the issue and political status of Jerusalem," and that it "nonetheless assume[d] a particular signification because the character of Jerusalem - a city holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians - is an exhortation to achieve peace and reconciliation." Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

He was again confronted by Kollek's forceful attempts to obtain a *de facto* recognition of the Israeli annexation of the city in November 1987 during his visit to Israel as prime minister (the first official visit to the country by a French prime minister in office). Yet this time he did not give in to Kollek's maneuvers, who tried to receive him in his municipality, feeling that the Israeli mayor wanted to force his hand and even judging the method "twisted." *Ibidem*, quoted p. 171.

³⁰² Quoted in Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

³⁰³ Which would be forcefully closed by Ariel Sharon in 2001.

³⁰⁴ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

that as long as a definitive settlement of the Palestinian question [was] not found, the *status quo* should prevail as far as the status of Jerusalem was concerned.”³⁰⁵ He then handed over to PLO leader in Jerusalem Faisal Husseini a personal letter by Chirac repeating the French position on the city’s status and stating that the French foreign minister would continue to visit Palestinian officials at the Orient House despite Israeli threats.³⁰⁶ The words were however directly contradicted by the very fact that it was not the French foreign minister himself but a health secretary of state who was delivering the message. Actually, Chirac’s attempts to live down his previous outfit of anger in Jerusalem continued upon his return in France, as illustrated by his unexpected decision to organize the commemoration of the Grand Sanhedrin, a Jewish high court convened by Napoleon I in 1807, to the surprise of the Jewish community itself who wondered why celebrating the 190th anniversary of that date...³⁰⁷

This ambivalence turned into a clearer endorsement of the Israeli theses during the July 2000 Camp David negotiations, when the status of Jerusalem was for the first time officially addressed by the parties. The French president, like most of the international community at the time, fell to “one of the biggest Israeli public relations fraud”³⁰⁸ according to which Arafat was responsible for the failure of the summit by rejecting what President Clinton described as Ehud Barak’s “generous offer,” i.e. a Palestinian state consisting of four separate cantons whose borders, airspace, and water resources would be controlled by Israel,³⁰⁹ and the annexation of 9% of the West Bank in addition to a *de facto* appropriation of another 10% of land in the Jordan Valley.³¹⁰ The fact that the Palestinian delegation had made marked concessions during the talks – for instance showing readiness to accept some Israeli settlement blocs with territorial exchange on a 1:1 basis as well as a “pragmatic” solution of the application of the right of return according to UNGA Resolution 194 (i.e. not likely to cause demographic problems for the State of Israel)³¹¹ – was kept silent from the dominant narrative of Camp David. Thus, when Arafat visited Chirac in Paris in the wake of the summit in an effort to restore the truth and explain the important compromises the

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Khader, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁰⁷ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

³⁰⁸ Swisher, Clayton, *The Truth About Camp David: The Untold Story about the Collapse of the Middle East Peace Process*, Nation Books, New York, 2004, p. 306. See also Baumgarten, Helga, *The Myth of Camp David Or The Distortion of the Palestinian Narrative*, Strategic Papers No. 7, Birzeit University, 2004, [http://ialiis.birzeit.edu/fmru/userfiles/The-Myth-of-Camp-David\[2011060111520\].pdf](http://ialiis.birzeit.edu/fmru/userfiles/The-Myth-of-Camp-David[2011060111520].pdf).

³⁰⁹ See PASSIA, “Jerusalem. Israeli Settlement Activities & Related Policies”, *op. cit.*

³¹⁰ Baumgarten, *op. cit.*

³¹¹ *Ibidem*.

Palestinian negotiators had made contrary to Israeli claims, the French president's answer was unequivocal. He said: "The American administration as well as public opinions in the United States and Europe got the feeling that Barak took steps ahead compared to the positions he defended previously, regarding either the territories or the settlements, while you, on the other hand, did not budge from your initial standpoints."³¹²

This espousal of the Israeli discourse appeared most vividly on the question of Jerusalem – acknowledged as the major cause for the failure of the negotiations – as Jacques Chirac became more involved in the resolution of the status issue, and especially the thorny question of the sovereignty over the Old City and its holy sites. In a phone conversation with Ehud Barak on 26 August 2000, during which the Israeli Premier claimed that at Camp David he "had taken unprecedented risks, brought [his] political career into play" on the issue of Jerusalem, and emphasized that "no Israeli prime minister will ever grant the exclusive sovereignty on the Temple Mount" to Palestinians, Chirac expressed his understanding, saying: "I subscribe to your analysis on the central character of the question of the status of Jerusalem in the perspective of an agreement. Never has Israel gone so far in the idea of the sharing of Jerusalem, that is to say much beyond its red lines."³¹³

In truth, though, the Israeli position at Camp David was far from compromising. Although Barak's delegation had made some concessions from its original position, in the end it insisted on keeping sovereignty over Jerusalem as a whole, including the Haram Ash-Sharif.³¹⁴ More precisely, if the Israelis accepted that Palestinian suburbs located in the exterior circle of the city (such as Beit Hanina) fall under Palestinian sovereignty, it envisioned this possibility for only one or two of the Palestinian neighborhoods in the so-called inner circle (e.g. Wadi Joz or Sheikh Jarrah). Regarding the Old City, after proposing that the Muslim and Christian Quarters be placed under Palestinian sovereignty and the Armenian and Jewish Quarters under Israeli one, Barak eventually withdrew the bid despite the intervention of President Clinton who wanted it back on the table. Instead, the Israelis suggested a special regime for the Muslim, Christian and Armenian quarters alongside joint security in the Old City, and "offered" as a substitute to East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital the nearby West Bank town of Abu Dis cut off from the Holy City by

³¹² Quoted in Enderlin, Charles, *Le rêve brisé : Histoire de l'échec du processus de paix au Proche-Orient, 1995-2002*, Fayard, Paris, 2002, p. 270.

³¹³ *Ibidem*, quoted pp. 274-275.

³¹⁴ Baumgarten, *op. cit.*



“Mosque of Omar, Jerusalem” by Maxime du Camp (1852)

the separation barrier), and a mere seat for the Palestinian government inside the Old City under Palestinian sovereignty. Last, as far as the Al-Aqsa compound was concerned, the Israelis conceded that it be put under Palestinian “custodianship” with the presence of Palestinian security, but demanded that it remained under Israeli “residual” sovereignty.³¹⁵ In addition, Palestinians were asked to give space to Jews for prayer in the esplanade of the Mosque area, in a clear modification of the accepted *status quo* in place since 1967. Although the Palestinians were willing to consider solutions involving Israeli authority over the Jewish Quarter and the Western/Al-Buraq Wall³¹⁶ as well as most of the newly created Israeli colonies in East Jerusalem³¹⁷ – a compromise from their initial position that sovereignty had to be divided along the 1967 lines (with potential modifications through mutually agreed exchanges) and that the Old City was therefore to fall under the Palestinians’ legal sovereignty – they could not accept an Israeli control over the

³¹⁵ Baumgarten, *op. cit.*

³¹⁶ According to Muslim tradition, this is the wall where Prophet Mohammed tied his winged creature, Al-Buraq, before ascending to heaven on his journey from Mecca to Jerusalem (*Al-Isra’ wa Al-Miraj*), where he received the revelations of Islam. The Jews call it the “Wailing Wall,” the “Western Wall,” or the “Kotel” and claim it is the remaining part of Herod’s Temple.

³¹⁷ With the exception of Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa settlement) and Ras Al-Amud. Baumgarten, *op. cit.*

Islamic Noble Sanctuary.³¹⁸ As Arafat argued during the talks, he was not negotiating Jerusalem on behalf of the Palestinians only, but on behalf of a billion Muslims worldwide whose spiritual leaders had repeatedly forbidden any concession on this third holiest site of Islam.³¹⁹

Notwithstanding, Jacques Chirac and his team in the Elysée and the Quai d'Orsay kept working on solutions which could not satisfy the Palestinian side as they entailed a significant loss of sovereignty on their behalf, particularly on the Haram Ash-Sharif where their suggestions echoed the Israelis' request that the earth and tunnels beneath the Islamic site (in particular the so-called "Foundation Stone of the Temple") would remain under Israeli control.³²⁰ The French president exposed them to Barak during their telephone conversation:

Camp David has shown that the territorial division of Jerusalem and the future State of Palestine find their ultimate limit in the question of the Esplanade of the Mosques. We must resort to another formula than that of an exclusive Israeli or Palestinian state sovereignty. Shouldn't we look for a specific status grounded on co-sovereignty, not only for the Esplanade of the Mosques but for the totality of the Old City? The international community could act as a witness and guarantor of the commitments of both sides [...].³²¹

When Chirac tested a similar idea developed in concert with the US State Department on Arafat in September 2000, the phone conversation almost turned to a direct altercation between the two men. Arafat could not accept the proposal that the Palestinians "would have sovereignty on the Esplanade of the Mosques and some depth under the surface [while] the Israelis would enjoy underground sovereignty starting from the presumed remains of the Temple."³²² He explained: "We refuse the horizontal division of the sovereignty on the Haram Ash-Sharif because of the sanctity of this holy place and the absence of remnants of the Temple under the Esplanade of the Mosques. The Israelis have been conducting unsuccessful archeological diggings there for 34 years."³²³ Chirac then started toughening his tone:

³¹⁸ PASSIA, "Jerusalem. Israeli Settlement Activities & Related Policies", *op. cit.*

³¹⁹ "Do you want to attend my funeral?" he exclaimed to Clinton. "My hands are tied; all the muftis of the Arab world have issued *fatwas* prohibiting any concession on this holy place of Islam." Quoted in Enderlin, *op.cit.*, p. 276.

³²⁰ Sebag Montefiore, *op. cit.*

³²¹ Quoted in Enderlin, *op. cit.*, p. 274-275.

³²² *Ibidem*, quoted p. 280.

³²³ *Ibidem*.

Whether these vestiges exist or not should not come into consideration. It is the idea that the people of Israel have about it which cannot be overlooked [...] We cannot ask any of the parties to renounce what it considers as sacred. The Palestinian sovereignty would be active on the whole space, and the Israeli one would be passive since it would apply to an inert part of the subsoil.³²⁴

If, as expressed by former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, “two thirds of the Arab–Israeli conflict is psychology,” and if indeed the respect of the emotional dimension of the issue and each side’s historical narrative is fundamental, the Muslims’ aversion to harming the integrity of their holy sanctuary could not be disregarded either. Instead, as Arafat insisted on evoking studies proving the inexistence of remains of the Jewish Temple, Chirac eventually seemed to lose patience:

It is not a debate about the reality of the supposed foundations of the Temple but the conscience that the Israeli people have about it. Today all the elements of a historic peace agreement are on the table. If it is not concluded, instability will resume, as will Israeli aggressiveness toward the Palestinian people, and terrorism. [...] We have the feeling that the Israeli prime minister will be able to take the risk of compromising on Temple Mount. Three to four weeks remain to reach an agreement and sign a historic peace, or plunge back into the worst difficulties.³²⁵

On that last point, undoubtedly, the French president was right.

The Final Twist

Jacques Chirac’s dark previsions were fulfilled a few days later when the Second Intifada erupted following the visit of the head of the Likud party Ariel Sharon to the Haram Ash-Sharif. After describing Sharon’s act as an “irresponsible provocation,”³²⁶ the French president condemned Israel’s intransigence and disproportionate use of force, telling Ehud Barak in October 2000: “Nobody will ever believe that the Palestinians bear the responsibility for the escalation of violence. The use of combat helicopters against stone-throwers is unacceptable.”³²⁷ The failure of the cease-fire negotiations held in Paris under the auspices of the United States, which Barak blamed

³²⁴ *Ibidem*, quoted pp. 280-281.

³²⁵ *Ibidem*.

³²⁶ Quoted in Aeschmann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

³²⁷ *Ibidem*, quoted p. 319.

on Chirac's intervention,³²⁸ marked the beginning of a quasi-rupture in the relations between France and Israel, which grew deeper with the election of Sharon as prime minister in February 2001. France condemned Israel's attacks on several occasions during those years and rejected its all-out military solution, trying instead to propose political alternatives for a settlement of the conflict. For instance, when the 11 September 2001 attacks placed the fight against "Islamist terrorism" at the top of Washington's agenda and were taken by Israel as an opportunity to equate Al-Qaida's assault with the Palestinian uprising, calling Arafat "[Israel's] Bin Laden," the Elysée refused the amalgam. It argued instead that the end of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories depended essentially on the resumption of the peace process and the creation of a Palestinian state.³²⁹ To that aim, France authored a proposal, presented by the European Union (EU) in February 2002, involving the holding of elections in Palestine and the declaration of an independent Palestinian state as a starting point for resuming final status negotiations.³³⁰ During that period, President Chirac was also one of the rare western leaders to oppose Israeli and American attempts to isolate Arafat and force him to step down, warning against the marginalization of the Palestinian leader, whom he described as "probably the only person capable of imposing on the Palestinian people compromises, particularly of a territorial nature."³³¹ The crisis between France and Israel was further fueled by France's leading role in the attempts to prevent the 2003 Bush administration's war against Iraq (accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction capable of destroying Israel), and by the greatest wave of anti-Semitism acts that France had reportedly experienced since the 1930s,³³² which some analysts interpreted as an output of the "importation" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This in turn generated a real "French bashing" in Israel, with the Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Melchior describing France as "the worst Western country as

³²⁸ As a cease-fire agreement was drawing closer, Arafat refused to sign the document at the last moment and the Israelis accused Chirac of having convinced him to do so. *Ibidem*.

³²⁹ Cf. Statement of the French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine in *Le Monde* of 22 October 2001: "Only [...] a clear and straightforward solution, the creation of a viable Palestinian State, will provide a way out of this tragedy and allow the building of a new Middle East."

³³⁰ "Non-Paper on the Revival of a Dynamic of Peace in the Middle East", 22 February 2002.

³³¹ Guitta, Olivier, "The Chirac Doctrine", *Middle East Quarterly*, Autumn 2005, <http://www.meforum.org/772/the-chirac-doctrine>.

This position was exemplified by the meetings held with Yasser Arafat in his besieged Ramallah headquarters, in defiance of Israel's interdiction, by two successive French Foreign Ministers (Dominique de Villepin and Michel Barnier, in May 2003 and June 2004 respectively).

³³² This seems however to be contradicted by statistics: "Year after year, the statistics issued by the National Human Rights Consultative Commission (CNCDH) puts into perspective anti-Jews violence [in France], showing that they are part of a wider surge of racism targeting first and foremost Arabs and Muslims [...]. As an ideology, anti-Semitism appears in fact marginal, especially compared to a more common Islamophobia." Vidal, Dominique, "CRIF, la droitisation d'une institution. Ceux qui parlent au nom des Juifs de France", *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 2011, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2011/07/VIDAL/20775>.

far as the number of anti-Semitic incidents is concerned,”³³³ and Ariel Sharon repeatedly urging French Jews to leave their homeland and resettle in Israel, dedicating exceptional financial support to their migration. This smear campaign deeply upset Chirac, especially at a time when he was running for reelection against the racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and xenophobic National Front party of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Not denying that there was an anti-Israeli climate in his country, the French president attributed it mainly to the politics of the Sharon administration.³³⁴



“Jack Chirac” Street, Ramallah, Palestine

The relations between the two countries improved however in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, as if Chirac tried to make up for its defiant position on the subject, and especially after the sudden demise of Yasser Arafat on 11 November 2004.³³⁵ The episode itself was another source of friction, with the Israelis criticizing France for accepting the request of Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei that the ailing Palestinian president be hospitalized in France, then criticizing the solemn homage Chirac gave to the “man of courage and conviction who ha[d] personified for 40 years the struggle of the Palestinians for the recognition of their national rights,”³³⁶ and accusing France of partiality for publishing a death certificate indicating that Arafat was born in Jerusalem.³³⁷ Nonetheless, following the disappearance of the man who had represented the main bone of contention with the Israeli authorities, Chirac seemed eager to normalize relations.³³⁸ This was achieved only six months later, when Ariel Sharon was received officially in Paris. The meeting took place in a cordial atmosphere, with the French leader refraining from condemning recent unlawful Israeli actions, including the construction of the separation barrier begun a month earlier, and the two men gladly discovering that they had a common passion for agriculture... After the encounter, Jacques Chirac declared in an interview for *Haaretz* that “the State of Israel is a great

³³³ Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³³⁴ Necker, *op. cit.*

³³⁵ Ten years later, the circumstances of the death of the Palestinian leader remain unclear, and some accuse the French authorities of hiding the truth on a suspected poisoning.

³³⁶ Quoted in Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

³³⁷ Uncertainty remains as to the exact birth place of Yasser Arafat. Isabel Pisano, who knew the Palestinian leader personally, claims in her autobiography that he was born in the Old City of Jerusalem, Fakhriya neigh-borhood, on 4 August 1929, but that his birth was registered ten days later in Cairo where his family had moved because of the deteriorating situation in Palestine. Arafat’s wife and daughter obtained the French nationality in 1996. Cf. Pisano, Isabel, *Yasser Arafat intime. La Passion de la Palestine*, Editions Demi-Lune, Paris, 2009.

³³⁸ 346 Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

friend,” and Sharon in turn qualified Chirac as one of the “world great leaders.”³³⁹ Successively, the French president multiplied gestures of good will towards Israel, upgrading cooperation in all fields, and performed a wide-ranging rapprochement with Washington, which materialized in a tougher stance against the Syrian and Iranian regimes as well as Hezbollah and Hamas.³⁴⁰ In short, as worded by Freddy Eytan, a former Israeli diplomat posted in Paris: “Giscard was distant. Mitterrand made symbolic gestures. Chirac moved into action.”³⁴¹

On the Palestinian file, the French president’s evident desire to live down his previous critical stance translated into an excess of zeal in the opposite direction, appearing to conform almost blindly to Israeli and US policies and abstaining from any initiative or comment that they may judge inopportune, including during the June 2006 “Summer Rains” military attack on the Gaza Strip which killed more than 300 Palestinians.³⁴² This passivity affected also Chirac’s diplomacy on the issue of Jerusalem, in sharp contrast with the activism he had shown in the past. A point in case was the Jerusalem light rail, in which the French companies Alstom and Connex were involved. The new Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas alerted his French counterpart on the political implication of the route of the light rail, meant to ensure contiguity between Israeli colonies and Jerusalem in a clear attempt to “strengthen Jerusalem [...] as eternal capital of the Jews and unified capital of the State of Israel,” as declared by Sharon himself at the contract-signing ceremony. However Jacques Chirac did apparently nothing more than promising to study the file and reassuring that the participation of French firms in the project would not change France’s official position on the question. More revealing of the French government’s lethargy on the issue was the so-called “Jerusalem Report” drafted in 2005 by EU diplomats in East Jerusalem and Ramallah. Critical of Israeli continuous violations of international law with regard to Jerusalem, which the authors considered as “jeopardiz[ing] any possibility of an agreement on the final status of the city,” the report raised the alarm on the situation of its Palestinian residents and accused Israel of using settlement expansion and the separation barrier itinerary to sever Jerusalem from

³³⁹ Quoted in Necker, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³⁴⁰ Inaugurated by France’s co-sponsoring with the United States of UNSC Resolution 1559 on Lebanon in September 2004, a motion accused by some specialists of aggravating the Lebanese crisis by splitting further the political landscape between pro- and anti-Syrians, and playing in favor of Israel (the text ruled out any extension to the term of office of the Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, regarded as a sympathizer of Hezbollah, and called for the withdrawal of foreign forces, i.e. Syrian troops, and the disarmament of all militias, i.e. both Hezbollah and the armed Palestinian organizations. Cf. Laurens, Henry, *La question de Palestine, op.cit.*

³⁴¹ Freddy, Eytan, “La France, Israël et les Arabes : le double jeu”, *Outre-Terre*, No. 9, April 2004, Paris, www.cairn.info/revue-oultre-terre-2004-4-page-437.htm.

³⁴² Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

the West Bank. Although Paris was reportedly not opposed to the public disclosure of the document, it seemingly yielded to pressure against it exerted by some countries such as Italy and Germany which criticized it as one-sided, and to the warning of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana who evoked the risk of alienating Israel and undermining the EU's influence in the peace process. Questioned on the publication of the report, Chirac's Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy alleged firstly the necessity to postpone it on account of concomitant elections in Palestine and Israel, and later gave as a pretext that it had become "outdated" and as such could no more be released.³⁴³ A day after the report was shelved by EU foreign ministers at their 12 December 2005 meeting in Brussels, Israel announced the building of 300 new homes in Ma'ale Adumim, a colony cutting apart the southern and northern parts of the West Bank a few kilometers east of Jerusalem.

The lethargy of the last years of Jacques Chirac's presidential mandate, his acquiescence to Israel's continuous transgressions, his support for controversial measures domestically (such as the February 2005 draft law stating that "School curricula recognize partially the positive role of the French presence [i.e. colonization], including in North Africa"), alongside the quasi-failure of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in which he had invested so much effort,³⁴⁴ put the final touches to Chirac's "Arab policy" – a term to which he actually never referred again after his 1996 Cairo speech.³⁴⁵ For some, all his initiatives in the region aimed in substance at resuscitating France's lost grandeur at the expense of the US and on the back of its European partners, never really involved, contrary to his claims, in his Middle East diplomacy. Even his spectacular fit of anger in the Old City of Jerusalem was interpreted by some observers as a manifestation of his desire to reassert French past influence in the city and to remind that France's three-century old role as protector of the Christians still entitled it with special privileges.³⁴⁶ In any case, his successor would plainly confirm France's stronger alignment with Israel and the US, removing any residual ambiguities.

³⁴³ Reported by Bernard Ravenel, then President of the France-Palestine Solidarity Association (AFPS), to Marc Necker, author of *Intifada française* (*op. cit.*) on 11 August 2006 (pp. 262-63).

³⁴⁴ Launched in Barcelona in November 1995, this partnership between the EU and 12 countries of the Southern Mediterranean region aimed to turn the Mediterranean into a common area of peace, stability and prosperity through the reinforcement of political dialogue and cooperation in fields such as security, economy, human development and culture. In 2005, most of the Arab head of states abstained from attending the ceremony celebrating the Partnership's tenth anniversary.

³⁴⁵ Aeschimann/Boltanski, *op. cit.*

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem.* Cf. Inside Saint Anne Church, he had told Palestinian dignitaries: "My presence here follows a multi-secular tradition. France has played a primordial role in the protection of the holy places."

Chapter Seven

Sarkozy, the Uninhibited Friendship for Israel

The “Honeymoon” between France and Israel

As the grandchild of a Jewish immigrant from Thessaloniki, a Greek city known as the “Mother of Israel” and the “Jerusalem of the Balkans,” Nicolas Sarkozy had a special attachment to the Jewish people. Himself a Catholic, he evoked willingly his Jewish roots when it could please his audience, and played resolutely the card of Jewish communitarianism to promote his ascension to power. In the process, he did not hesitate to draw a disturbing equation between support for Judaism and support for the State of Israel, adopting whole-heartedly the theses of pro-Israeli groups according to which any criticism of Israel amounted to anti-Semitism. Since the beginning of his political career, Sarkozy endeavored therefore to build strong relations with French Jews and supporters of Israel, starting when he was mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine, an affluent Parisian suburb home to an important Jewish population to whom he attended diligently. He also never missed an opportunity to declare publicly his strong backing of Israel, like in June 2003 at the “12 Hours for the France-Israel Friendship” conference, attended by Benjamin Netanyahu, where he claimed: “Israel is a great democracy, and this is sufficient to be hailed and respected.”³⁴⁷ In December 2004, he went a step further by declaring his reverence in Israel itself, where he was received as a real statesman although he did not have any governmental portfolio at the time, meeting with several high-level politicians including Ariel Sharon whose actions he qualified as “useful and courageous.”³⁴⁸ In the address he gave on that occasion at the Herzliya Conference, Israel’s annual global policy gathering, he castigated the traditional French diplomacy in the Middle East and went so far as to praise the 1956 joint French-Israeli military expedition against Egypt’s Nasser.³⁴⁹

The United States – for which Nicolas Sarkozy, mocked by some as “Sarko the American,” nurtured a real admiration – was another terrain where he attempted to develop connections with pro-

³⁴⁷ Quoted in Blanrue, Paul-Eric, *Sarkozy, Israël et les Juifs*, Marco Pietteur Editeur, Embourg, 2009, p. 50.

³⁴⁸ Referring to Sharon’s unilateral evacuation of the Israeli army and settlers from Gaza in 2005, a decision which his aide Dov Weisglass said would prevent a Palestinian State for years to come (*Haaretz*, 6 October 2004).

³⁴⁹ Gresh, Alain, “Nicolas Sarkozy, Al-Qaida, Israël et le Proche-Orient (I)”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, 24 March 2007, <http://blog.mondediplo.net/2007-03-24-Nicolas-Sarkozy-Al-Qaida-Israel-et-le-Proche>.

Israeli groups that could prove politically useful. The first contact he made was in October 2003 as minister of the interior, when he received a delegation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) which resulted in the training of the French security apparatus by Israeli experts in the “fight against anti-Semitism.” In September 2006, Sarkozy held behind closed doors a meeting at the French consulate general in New York with representatives of the major American pro-Israeli lobby groups, during which he reasserted: “I am the friend of America, I am the friend of Israel.”³⁵⁰ His visit across the Atlantic was crowned by an audience with President George W. Bush himself, “an exceptional event for a simple minister” according to the *New York Times*, probably accorded on account of the concordance of views on world politics between the two men. Indeed, like Bush Junior and his neoconservative administration, Sarkozy adhered to the theory of the “clash of civilizations” and its essentialist conception of religions and cultures, as would be evident in his first presidential speech on French foreign policy, where the theme of “confrontation between Islam and the West” would be mentioned no less than six times. In fact once at the head of the state, Sarkozy would enact his stigmatized conception of Islam through a far-right policy based on repressive security measures and the instrumentalization of xenophobia for political end, to the point of establishing a special ministry amalgamating the issues of “Immigration and National Identity.” At the European level, this vision would translate into an insistence on the “Christian roots” of the Old Continent, the belief in the necessity of a “fortress Europe” in the face of growing immigration, and a virulent opposition to the accession of Turkey to EU membership chiefly on account of the Muslim creed of most of its population.³⁵¹



Nicolas Sarkozy at the Knesset, June 2008
© UPI Photo/Ronen Zvulun/Pool

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Blanrue, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³⁵¹ Fabre, Thierry, "Nicolas Sarkozy et la Méditerranée, des lignes de failles", *La pensée de midi*, No. 22, March 2007, www.cairn.info/revue-la-pensee-de-midi-2007-3-page-4.htm. For instance, in meetings with Irish PM Bertie Ahern and Swedish PM Fredrik Reinfeldt in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy reportedly launched a diatribe against Muslims, criticizing the difficulties of integration of “the too many Muslims living in Europe” and describing in an apocalyptic way the “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West, visibly in order to justify its opposition to Turkey’s adhesion to the EU. Quatremer, Jean, "Sarkozy et les Musulmans", *Libération*, Novembre 2007, <http://bruxelles.blogs.liberation.fr/coulisses/2007/11/sarkozy-et-les-.html>.

Nicolas Sarkozy's gestures of sympathy toward Israel in the period preceding the 2007 presidential elections were so conspicuous that in March 2007, right before the vote, he was accused of being a Mossad spy in an anonymous letter sent to a hundred French high public officials...³⁵² Unquestionably, his reputation was excellent among French Jews in Israel who voted for him in their vast majority.³⁵³ As soon as elected, Sarkozy published an official communiqué pledging that Israel could "always count on [his] friendship," and to keep his word he started by conducting a purge of French intelligence and security services from agents believed to be too close to his rival Socialist Party or too "pro-Arab." He also endeavored to marginalize the traditional Quai d'Orsay diplomats, whom he regarded as "cowards,"³⁵⁴ and appointed at key positions in the North Africa and Middle East directorate of the Foreign Affairs Ministry the French equivalents of the American neo-cons.³⁵⁵ At their head, he designated the "French doctor" Bernard Kouchner, profoundly attached to Israel and the Jewish community, in a concession to Israeli officials who had been scandalized by earlier rumors of a possible nomination to the post of foreign minister of the more critical Hubert Védrine. Last, the so-called "Omni-president" pushed the concept of "*domaine réservé*" to the extreme, with an unprecedented concentration of decision-making powers in his own hands. Once these structural changes were made, Sarkozy had his hands free to re-orient the French diplomacy in favor of neoconservative and pro-Israeli views. He thus rapidly authorized the deployment of French combat aviation in the south of Afghanistan, finalized the return of France to NATO's integrated military command,³⁵⁶ sided totally with the US and Israel on the Iranian file, and made some more symbolic gesture such as being the first head of state to be present at the annual dinner of the pro-Israeli lobby group CRIF, usually attended by the prime minister only.

These preliminary steps were welcomed by Israel's advocates, notably the AJC which in November 2007 awarded Sarkozy the renowned "Light Unto the Nations" prize. As a matter of

³⁵² Blanrue, *op. cit.*

³⁵³ 84.5% of French-Israelis voted for Sarkozy at the first round of the elections, and 90.7% at the second one.

³⁵⁴ Yasmina Reza, in her book *Dawn Dusk or Night: A Year with Nicolas Sarkozy* (2007), quoted him as saying: "It became very important to get rid of the Quai d'Orsay. I despise all these guys, they are cowards." Quoted in Amalric, Jacques, "Sarkozy, l'inconstance faite diplomatie", *Alternatives Internationales*, No. 54, March 2012, http://www.alternatives-internationales.fr/sarkozy--l-inconstance-faite-diplomatie_fr_art_1140_58261.html.

³⁵⁵ Even nominating the director of the AJC French chapter, Valérie Hoffenberg, as Special Representative for the Economic, Cultural, Commercial, Educational and Environmental Dimension of the Middle East Peace Process.

³⁵⁶ This important political symbol was the last step of a process started in fact under Chirac during NATO intervention in Bosnia in 1994. Cf. Vaisse Justin, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Foreign Policy: Gaullist by Any Other Name", Brookings, June-July 2008, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2008/06/04-sarkozy-vaisse>.

fact, a real “honeymoon”³⁵⁷ – as termed by the president’s spokesman – began between France and Israel, which translated into a multiplication of official contacts at the highest level. The first months of his tenure saw indeed an intensive succession of visits to the French capital by Israeli leaders (Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in October 2007, Likud’s chief Benjamin Netanyahu a month later, Defense Minister Ehud Barak in January 2008, and the Israeli President Shimon Peres in March 2008), which culminated in May 2008 by the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the creation of Israel. A few weeks later, accompanied by a conspicuous delegation of politicians, businessmen and artists committed to the Israeli cause, Sarkozy made his first official visit as French president to Israel, where he was granted “the honors usually reserved to American presidents.”³⁵⁸ The apex of the visit was the speech he gave at the Knesset, where he declared:

There is no other state in the world whose very existence was from the outset so closely linked to the affirmation of an ideal of justice and a desire to live in peace. [...] No one can think of Israel without remembering the pogroms, sealed trains and gas chambers. [...] The French people have stood at your side from the moment of your birth. I came to tell you that the French people will always stand at Israel’s side whenever its existence is threatened.

While his address was welcome by standing ovations from Israeli politicians and dignitaries, the reaction of Palestinian leaders to the French president’s visit was less enthusiastic. The mood was summarized by a PNA adviser: “The Palestinians have the feeling of being left behind in Nicolas Sarkozy’s visit. Barely four hours in a program of 45 hours, that is minimum service.”³⁵⁹

The verbal declarations and symbolic gestures towards Israel – which continued with for instance the participation of a unit of the Israeli army in the military parade of Bastille Day on 14 July 2007 – were complemented by the intensification of the cooperation between the two countries at all levels.³⁶⁰ In addition, France took advantage of holding the presidency of the EU in the sec-

³⁵⁷ *Le Monde*, quoted in Blanrue, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³⁵⁸ *Le Figaro*, quoted in Blanrue, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁵⁹ Quoted in Blanrue, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

³⁶⁰ For instance, on 20 July 2011 the French Minister of Defense announced that his country would buy from Israel more than 318 million Euros worth of weapons, without regard to ethical considerations and despite the climate of austerity in France and the opposition of the French Senate itself on grounds that Israeli drones were unsuited to the needs of the French armed forces. Abunimah, Ali, “Campaign launched against French

ond half of 2008 to boost the level of Israel's cooperation with the union itself. In June 2008 it was revealed that for a year Israel had been discreetly holding negotiations to obtain a status of EU quasi-member state, requiring no less than participating in European Council meetings dealing with issues as varied as security, strategic affairs, economy, energy, the media, and higher education, as well as the formation of a joint EU-Israel parliamentary structure.³⁶¹ On 8 December 2008, just before losing the rotating presidency, the French managed to convince their European partners of upgrading the EU-Israel cooperation agreement, which was accompanied by lengthy "Guidelines for strengthening the political dialogue structures with Israel."³⁶² This indubitably gave Tel Aviv a dangerous sense of impunity: a few days later, on 27 December 2008, it launched one of its most lethal military attacks on the Gaza Strip so far (code-named "Cast Lead"), allegedly to prevent Hamas from firing rockets on its territory. Again, the French president endorsed the Israeli version of the events, pointing an accusing finger at Hamas which it blamed of provoking the confrontation. Meanwhile, domestically Nicolas Sarkozy initiated a repressive policy against pro-Palestinian activists, in particular those of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement who became indictable of alleged "incitement to hatred" for calling for the boycott of Israel. As a result, France ended up being the only country, along with Israel, to criminalize a civic non-violent initiative against this country's violation of international law.³⁶³

purchase of Israeli drones as senators demand deal be abandoned", The Electronic Intifada, 30 December 2011, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/campaign-launched-against-french-purchase-israeli-drones-senators-demand-deal-be>.

³⁶¹ Blanrue, *op. cit.* The negotiations had not only been kept secret from the general public but from the European Parliament itself.

³⁶² This included the holding of meetings on common issues at the highest level, broadening the scope of ministerial consultation, giving Israel more frequent access to the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC), providing for hearings of Israeli experts by Council working parties and committees, and organizing systematic and broader informal strategic consultations. In addition, the EU pledged to help Israel integrate into UN agencies and to include Israeli experts in EU peacekeeping forces. Cf. "Council Conclusions: Strengthening of the EU bilateral relations with its Mediterranean partners - upgrade with Israel."

³⁶³ Presumably at the request of the CRIF, the French Ministry of Justice issued in February 2010 an internal text, the so-called "Alliot-Marie Circular," ordering prosecutors to bring criminal charges against individuals calling for a boycott of Israel on the basis of an article of the French 1881 Law on the Press intended to combat hate speech, defamation and incitement to hatred. The decision was criticized by numerous jurists on the grounds of its farfetched reading of the law. Actions of boycotts against the policies of other governments have not been subjected to similar judicial proceedings in France.

Jerusalem and the Palestinian State: Velleity and Double Jeu

Against such a backdrop, the Sarkozy administration's declarations and initiatives for a just resolution of the Palestinian issue in general and the question of Jerusalem in particular, although remaining officially in line with the claimed neutrality of the past, appeared hardly credible. A point in case was the issue of the establishment of a Palestinian state. Following a near global consensus, the French president seemed to view favorably the new Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's reform program aimed at developing the institutions of a viable Palestinian state. Since Oslo, the international community had poured increasingly vast amounts of money to help building Palestinian institutions, a substitute, as critics suggested, for its lack of real political engagement.³⁶⁴ Likewise, the French became actively involved in the process, hosting in Paris on 17 December 2007 the Donors' Conference for the Palestinian state, where Fayyad unveiled his plan to focus on state-building as a way to bring the occupation to an end by making a future Palestinian state a "fact on the ground."³⁶⁵ However when in May 2011 Mahmoud Abbas, frustrated by the stalemate in the negotiations with Israel, disillusioned by the Obama administration,³⁶⁶ and encouraged by the internationally-praised progress of the state-building reforms, announced that he would request admission of Palestine as a full member of the UN on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as capital, the French government stepped back. It endorsed instead the Israeli counter arguments according to which peace could only occur through a negotiated process and not through "unilateral decisions," seemingly undisturbed by the fact that 20 years after Oslo the negotiations between unequal parties had clearly shown their limits. Not only settlement building was continuing unabated, but the Israeli authorities insisted that a future Palestinian state should be completely demilitarized, and had set as an additional prerequisite the prior recognition of Israel as "a Jewish state" – inadmissible as it further prejudiced the rights of Israel's Palestinian

³⁶⁴ See Le More, Anne, *International Assistance to the Palestinians after Oslo: Political Guilt, Wasted Money*, Routledge Studies on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, New York, 2008. The author concludes: "Within the international community, [the continued provision of aid] perpetuated the illusion that a 'process' was moving, and that third-party actors continued to have a key role to play. Yet in reality this evolution only exemplified the extent to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had become 'normalized' and the Palestinian state-building effort de-politicized [...]" (p. 110). She quotes a World Bank official explaining that financial assistance to Palestinian state-building without proper accountability in return served "to keep PA officials satisfied and have them accept the status quo. 'We give you money, you abandon the revolt, the occupation, the liberation'" (p. 145).

³⁶⁵ Rocha Menocal, Alina, "The Palestinian State-Building Agenda," Overseas Development Institute (ODI), March 2011, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/7318.pdf>.

³⁶⁶ On 18 February 2011, the US vetoed a UN resolution, tabled by the UN Arab group on the PNA's request, condemning Israel's settlement policy. The resolution gained the favorable votes of all the other 14 UNSC members.

citizens and compromised the UN-sanctioned refugees' right of return.³⁶⁷ Then, as the UNGA debate drew nearer, Nicolas Sarkozy became very active in making proposals aimed at convincing the Palestinians to abandon their bid for statehood and at protecting Israel from the consequences it feared most, namely the possibility of legal pursuit in international forums stemming from such recognition. For instance, he put forward an initiative under which the 27 EU members would unanimously support a UNGA resolution upgrading the PLO's status of "observer entity" at the UN to that of "non-member state," as opposed to full UN membership,³⁶⁸ on the condition that charges would not be pressed against Israelis for alleged war crimes. In this light, the decision to vote in favor of Palestine's membership to UNESCO in October 2011 was seen as a poor consolation prize to make the Palestinian leadership accept the French abstention at the UNSC.³⁶⁹

The same ambivalence marred the French policy on the issue of Jerusalem. In his 2008 address at the Knesset, Nicolas Sarkozy had expressed how "deeply moving" it was for him to be speaking in Jerusalem, "the city holy to three faiths," and had recalled the words of the Prophet Isaiah, respected by believers of the three monotheisms: "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress." To his credit, Nicolas Sarkozy was the first French president to call in such an arena for the sharing of the city as the capital of both Israelis and Palestinians, telling Israeli lawmakers: "There cannot be peace, even though I know how painful it is, without recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of two states and guaranteed freedom of access to the holy places for all the religions." His administration however did little to make this aspiration turn into a reality. To start with, no real pressure was ever put

³⁶⁷ Cf. Khalidi, Ahmad Samih, "Why Can't the Palestinians Recognize the Jewish State," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Summer 2011, pp. 78-81.

³⁶⁸ Admission as a state in the UN is regarded as the most powerful act of collective state recognition. The application is considered by the UNSC and any recommendation for admission must receive the affirmative votes of 9 of the 15 members of the Council, provided that none of its 5 permanent members votes against it. If the Council recommends admission, the recommendation is presented to the UNGA for consideration, where a two-thirds majority vote is necessary. Instead, a mere upgrade to the status of UN non-member state does not require UNSC approval but only a favorable vote of a simple majority of UNGA members. This watered-down alternative is what the Palestinians obtained on 29 November 2012.

³⁶⁹ On 11 November 2011, the UNSC adopted the "Report of the Committee on the Admission of New Members concerning the application of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations," which concluded that members were unable to reach the required consensus. Although the report did not specify which countries supported or opposed the bid, it could be deduced from official and media statements that eight UNSC members would have voted in favor (Brazil, China, India, Lebanon, Russia, South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon), that Britain, Colombia and France would have abstained, as was expected of Portugal and Bosnia, while the US had made clear it would use its veto and Germany would have either vetoed or abstained. In the end the PNA abandoned its bid for statehood via the UNSC. Cf. Farge, Elodie, *The Road to Palestinian Statehood. Review of a People's Struggle for National Independence*, PASSIA Publications, Jerusalem, December 2012.

on Israel to end its colonization of the city. Significantly, when the French president called in the Israeli parliament for an “end to all settlement activity,” he dropped the two important qualifying terms of such a measure as planned in his written speech, i.e. “complete and immediate.” The two adjectives of the initial version remained nonetheless on the website of the French presidency, leading to believe that they had actually been pronounced in the Knesset.³⁷⁰ Visibly, his “bolder” declarations to the Palestinian side – such as in an interview for the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Quds* in which he declared that “Peace cannot be reached by excluding Jerusalem, which is to become the capital of the two states” and that “the end of settlement building, including in East Jerusalem, is essential as it is the principal obstacle to peace” – were not enough to dissuade the Israeli government. Barely two weeks later, it announced the construction of 920 new housing units in the colony of Har Homa, on Jabal Abu Ghneim, in the southern periphery of the city.

Moreover, although Paris claimed that it championed the publication and implementation of the latest EU Heads of Mission reports on Jerusalem, which had grown increasingly alarming over the years, describing the systematic undermining of the Palestinians’ presence and rights as well as the risks of “radicalizing the conflict” by measures such as “emphasizing exclusively the Jewish identity of the city,”³⁷¹ it failed on several occasions to even condemn such transgressions. For instance when the spokesperson of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry was asked in December 2010 about a new report by the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem on the brutal arrest and ill-treatment of Palestinian minors in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan,³⁷² he had no official reaction or condemnation to convey. Instead, he declared that “In Israel, there are laws, [and] it is up to the Israeli justice to decide on these complaints,” as if France considered that it was the Israeli legislation which applied in an area yet officially considered as occupied.³⁷³ Even when France’s own interests in the city were victims of Israeli abuses, the government reacted rather blandly, as in December 2009 when the French Institute in East Jerusalem was surrounded by Israeli police sent to arrest the Palestinian organizer of an artistic event. At that time, Israel was worsening its crackdown on Palestinians activities in the city so as to mark its opposition to the celebration of “Jerusalem, Arab

³⁷⁰ Paris, Gilles, “Total et immédiat”, *Le Monde*, 14 July 2008, <http://israelpalestine.blog.lemonde.fr/2008/07/14/total-et-immediat/>.

³⁷¹ EU Heads of Mission Report on Jerusalem 2010.

³⁷² B’Tselem, “Caution: Children Ahead - The Illegal Behavior of the Police toward Minors in Silwan Suspected of Stone Throwing”, December 2010.

³⁷³ Gresh, Alain, “Quand Paris entérine l’arrestation d’enfants de moins de 12 ans en Palestine”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, 16 December 2010, <http://blog.mondediplo.net/2010-12-16-Paris-enterine-l-arrestation-d-enfants-de-moins>.

capital of culture 2009.” Although the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs qualified as “doubly excessive” the Israeli police deployment, which could have logically led to an official protest to the Israeli ambassador in Paris, it eventually failed to accompany the words with acts against these practices that entrenched the Israeli hold on occupied East Jerusalem.

France’s unwillingness to confront Israel on the question of Jerusalem was also evident in its diplomatic undertakings to move forward the settlement of the conflict. In December 2008, during the talks on the upgrade of the EU-Israel relations, the French had presented their European partners with an action plan for the peace process supposed to be adopted concomitantly with the upgrade agreement. The so-called “EU Action Strategy for Peace in the Middle East” outlined steps for advancing an Israeli-Palestinian deal with a focus on the core final issues of the conflict, i.e. borders, security, refugees, and Jerusalem. Regarding the latter, the plan reiterated the need for “a complete freeze of all settlement activities including natural growth, including in East Jerusalem,” suggested ensuring the access to the holy sites via the deployment of an international tourist police in the Old City, and proposed to work actively with the other European countries towards the re-opening of Palestinian institutions closed by Israel³⁷⁴ and the design of practical ways to manage Jerusalem as a shared capital. Stating that “a key part of building the Palestinian state involve[d] resolving the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states,” the text discarded the option of the physical partition of the city and instead proposed to give Jerusalem the status of an “open capital,” with two sovereign authorities and two municipal administrations. While these ideas were basically accepted by the Palestinian party, another element was more problematic: to prevent any potential problems of coordination between the two authorities, the French suggested the creation of an international liaison committee to deal with infrastructure issues (such as electricity, water and telephone) in the Palestinian sectors of Jerusalem – a municipal assistance which was frowned upon by the PNA as it would have deprived it of part of its sovereignty.³⁷⁵ Furthermore, in front of the fierce opposition of Israeli officials, who objected in

³⁷⁴ In 2001, the Israeli authorities decided to close many institutions which provided legal, economic, cultural and political support to the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem (including the Orient House, the Chamber of Commerce, the Arab Studies Society, the Higher Council for Tourism, the Palestinian Radio and Television Authority, the Palestinian Prisoners Society, and the Arab Women Care center), on the grounds that they were affiliated with the PNA (or Hamas) and therefore violated the Oslo Accords by operating in Jerusalem. See *Arab East Jerusalem*, PASSIA, Jerusalem, 2014. Since its occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has closed 88 Palestinian institutions and human rights, social and charitable organizations located in Jerusalem. <https://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/2012/01/31/maqdesi-the-ioa-has-closed-88-jerusalemite-institutions-since-1967>.

³⁷⁵ Malbrunot, Georges, “Le plan français pour la paix au Proche-Orient”, *Le Figaro*, 17 December 2008, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2008/12/18/01003-20081218ARTFIG00007-le-plan-francais-pour-la-paix-au-proche-orient-.php>.

particular to the call for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, Paris agreed that the EU does not officially endorse the document. While a number of European countries (including Britain, Belgium, and Ireland) had agreed with the Palestinians that the EU-Israel upgrade deal had to be conditioned, if not on an Israeli settlement freeze, at least on progress in final status negotiations, Paris thought otherwise. In response to Israeli pressure, including Livni's personal lobbying of her French counterpart Kouchner at an EU meeting in Brussels, France accepted that there would be no such linkage and the Action Strategy was consequently shelved as a mere proposal. Considering that all the justifications for the decision of stepping up the cooperation between the EU and Israel had been based on the grounds that it would allow the Europeans to have increased influence over the Israeli policy and the peace negotiations, the decision was a troubling paradox to say the least.³⁷⁶

Similarly, a year later France was accused of undermining a European common statement on those issues prepared at the initiative of Sweden, which was holding the EU presidency. The declaration, issued on 8 December 2009, reiterated that the EU would not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. It also urged Israel to immediately stop all settlement activities, called for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in the city, and asked the Israeli government to cease all discriminatory treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Despite this rather strong stance, the statement came as a disappointment for the Palestinian leadership who blamed in particular the French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner for weakening the initial Swedish text under the pressure of European pro-Israeli lobby groups. Indeed, while the first draft had called explicitly for the creation of "an independent, democratic, continuous and viable State of Palestine consisting of the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital," the final version used a more toned-down formulation, referring to the necessity of finding "*through negotiations* [a way] to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states."³⁷⁷ Following the ire of Israeli politicians, who had accused the earliest document of prejudicing the results of negotiations on Jerusalem and referring to "Palestine," the French ambassador to Israel Christophe Bigot had declared that his country also expressed "strong reservations" about the draft, saying that it should promote instead the

³⁷⁶ Gresh, Alain, "L'Union européenne capitule devant Israël", *Le Monde diplomatique*, 10 December 2008, <http://blog.mondediplo.net/2008-12-10-L-Union-europeenne-capitule-devant-Israel>.

³⁷⁷ Paris, Gilles, "Jérusalem-Est: les Européens oseront-ils?", *Le Monde*, 1 December 2009, <http://israelpalestine.blog.lemonde.fr/2009/12/01/jerusalem-est-les-europeens-oseront-ils/> and "Jérusalem 'future capitale de deux Etats'", 8 December 2009, <http://israelpalestine.blog.lemonde.fr/2009/12/08/jerusalem-future-capitale-de-deux-etats/#xtor=RSS-32280322>.

re-launching of the peace process.³⁷⁸ For the Palestinians, the call for negotiations included in the second version was totally inadequate at a time when talks were completely obstructed by Israel's right-wing government and the continuous expansion of colonization, as exemplified by the notification a few weeks earlier of a construction scheme of some 900 housing units in the colony of Gilo, located on Palestinian lands south of Jerusalem. The French foreign minister, who was visiting Israel in that period, considered that this new announcement of settlement building was "not a political decision, and should not be an obstacle to resuming negotiations."³⁷⁹ For the Secretary General of the Palestinian presidency, At-Tayyib Abdul-Rahim, "Kouchner should not have adopted such a stance which agree[d] with Israeli plans to weaken the Swedish proposal that clearly talk[ed] about Jerusalem as capital of the Palestinian state."³⁸⁰ The PNA official further noted that France's compliance with Israeli pressures on the Swedish initiative was perceived "with astonishment and resentment by the Palestinian people [...]."³⁸¹

The case of Jerusalem showed that Nicolas Sarkozy's claimed strategy of "re-balancing" the French diplomacy in favor of Israel so as to regain an influential role in the peace process, which he saw as obliterated by the much lambasted "Arabism" of his predecessors, was far from convincing. Indeed at the end of his time in office, France seemed to have not only lost its status of valid interlocutor in the eyes of Arab countries due to its unconditional support of Israel, but also encouraged Israeli leaders to ignore even more their obligations under international law.³⁸² In fact, during this period Israel did not even show gratefulness for Paris' attentions, inflicting various humiliations onto French diplomats without generating any firm official reactions.³⁸³ Symptomatic of Sarkozy's failure was his project of "Union for the Mediterranean." Based on the European

³⁷⁸ Keinon, Herb, "Paris comes out against Swedish plan", *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 December 2009, <http://www.jpost.com/International/Paris-comes-out-against-Swedish-plan>.

³⁷⁹ Somfalvi Attila, "Kouchner: Gilo construction won't necessarily hinder peace talks", *Ynet*, 18 November 2009, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3807450,00.html>.

³⁸⁰ "Swedish consul: EU statement not changed from draft", *Ma'an News Agency*, 9 December 2009, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=245552>.

³⁸¹ "PA: Kouchner weakened EU declaration on Jerusalem", *Ma'an News Agency*, 9 December 2009, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=245354>.

³⁸² Mardam Bey, Farouk, Interview for *Radio France Internationale*, 16 October 2010, <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20101016-sarkozy-proche-orient-farouk-mardam-bey>.

³⁸³ In June 2008, France's Vice-Consul in Jerusalem Ms. Catherine Hyver was detained for 17 hours in degrading conditions at one of Gaza checkpoints; during the Gaza War in January 2009, the house of a French consular agent was vandalized by Israeli soldiers who stole money and jewels; that same month, the car of the French consul general was subjected to "warning" shots; and in June 2009 the director of the French cultural center in Nablus was violently harassed by Israeli soldiers who beat and threatened her. Gresh, Alain, "Tel Aviv piétine ses alliés. Washington grommelle, Paris s'incline", *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2010, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2010/04/GRESH/18988>.

model of “*de facto* solidarities”³⁸⁴ – i.e. practical cooperation projects in areas such as culture, security and the economy as a way to foster peace between nations – the scheme was actively supported by Israeli officials but considered a normalization attempt by most Arab states.³⁸⁵ Sarkozy’s deliberate exclusion of political issues from the project as well as his refusal to keep Israel at bay as requested by several Arab capitals had doomed the initiative, and indeed all went to a standstill as early as December 2008 during the deadly Israeli attack on Gaza. And although Sarkozy became apparently frustrated and embittered by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling him a “liar” in a memorable microphone incident with President Obama in November 2011,³⁸⁶ he forgot his resentment when the time of his reelection approached, saluting the man’s “courage” and once again marveling at the “miracle” of Israel’s “democracy.”³⁸⁷



“*Inside Jaffa Gates*” by Félix Bonfils (circa 1867)

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³⁸⁴ Expression of Jean Monnet, French political economist and diplomat, one of the founding fathers of the European Communities.

³⁸⁵ In fact, the project was seen by many observers as a way to circumvent the Turkish request to adhere to the EU by offering some kind of compensation.

³⁸⁶ “I cannot stand him. He’s a liar,” Sarkozy told Obama. The US president responded by saying: “You’re fed up with him? I have to deal with him every day.” Sherwood, Harriet/Chrisafis, Angelique, “Sarkozy and Obama’s Netanyahu gaffe broadcast via microphones”, *The Guardian*, 8 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/08/sarkozy-obama-netanyahu-gaffe-microphone>.

³⁸⁷ Sarkozy’s speech at the February 2012 CRIF annual dinner. Quoted in Cronin, David, “Paris university pulls plug on ‘Israeli apartheid’ talk”, *The Electronic Intifada*, 17 February 2012, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/david/paris-university-pulls-plug-israeli-apartheid-talk>.

Chapter Eight

Hollande, the Equilibrist

Hollande and Israel: “La Vie en Rose”

Like his political mentor Mitterrand, the new Socialist Party Secretary General François Hollande, described sometimes as a tightrope walker for his difficulties to take side and make clear-cut decisions, claimed to follow an “equilibrated” position on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Like Mitterrand however, his conception of balance tended in practice to lean towards Israel. In that he symbolized the growing fracture between the Socialist Party grassroots on the one hand, which for the most part held the Israeli authorities responsible for the failure of the peace process, and most of its cadre on the other hand, more accommodating toward Israeli interests, as illustrated for instance by the so-called Boniface affair.³⁸⁸ François Hollande’s susceptibility to pro-Israeli pressure was highlighted by the volte-face he performed in the years preceding and succeeding his election at the head of the French Republic.³⁸⁹ In June 2011, when he was heading the opposition against the Sarkozy administration, his party had reacted to Mahmoud Abbas’ bid for recognition of Palestine at the UN by issuing an official statement urging France “to recognize the Palestinian state” on the occasion of the next UNGA, and calling for the end of the colonization of the Palestinian territories on the basis of the 1967 borders.³⁹⁰ However, this stance favorable to Palestinian national rights started fading away as the presidential elections approached. The issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was thus granted only two pithy sentences in the candidate Hollande’s political platform, merely reasserting the necessity to support peace through negotiations and rec-

³⁸⁸ In 2001, Pascal Boniface, professor of international relations and Socialist Party national adviser on strategic affairs, had sent a note to François Hollande on the necessity for the party to modify its position on the Middle East conflict so that it become conform with socialist values. After observing that “In any such situation, a humanist, and even more a liberal, would condemn the occupying power,” he concluded by recommending that Socialist Party leaders proceed to a political interpretation of the conflict based on the respect of “universal principles and not the weight of each community.” This advice of common sense did not go well with the French pro-Israeli lobby, which fought an intense smearing campaign against Boniface, accusing him of anti-Semitism and prompting Hollande and his collaborators to eventually dismiss the academic from any official role in the party. Boniface, Pascal, *Est-il permis de critiquer Israël ?*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 2003.

³⁸⁹ Backmann, René, “France - Palestine : la volte-face de François Hollande”, *Le Nouvel observateur*, 5 November 2012, <http://renebackmann.blogs.nouvelobs.com/archive/2012/11/05/france-palestine-la-volte-face-de-francois-hollande.html>.

³⁹⁰ “Le Parti socialiste appelle la France et l’Europe à reconnaître l’Etat palestinien pour avancer vers la paix et la réconciliation entre les peuples israéliens et palestiniens”, <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/communiqués/le-parti-socialiste-appelle-la-france-et-l-europe-a-reconnaitre-l-etat-palestinien-pour->.

ognize a Palestinian state, and Hollande conspicuously courted the French pro-Israeli electorate during the campaign. For instance, in an interview to a French Jewish news outlet, *Tribune Juive*, he promised to fight an all out war against anti-Semitism, avoided any critical remarks against the Israeli authorities, and called for intransigence when it came to Iran, “whose nuclear program is a danger to Israel and world peace.” In a meeting held with a delegation of the Zionist group CRIF in his campaign headquarters in January 2012, he was also quoted as saying that “if Israel is the object of so much criticism, it means that it constitutes a great democracy,” adding that “it is no doubt within the Socialist Party that one can find the largest number of friends of Israel and the Jewish people.”³⁹¹ In addition to personal beliefs, it is possible that the U-turn operated by the Socialist candidate in the run-up to the presidential elections was also motivated by more down-to-earth considerations. Indeed, according to an article published in the Los Angeles *Jewish Journal*, Francois Hollande’s campaign benefitted from conspicuous funding from the European Leadership Network (ELNET), the European equivalent of the American pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC, founded in 2007 to lobby European politicians in favor of Israel.³⁹² Although these allegations remain unverified, the fact are that the change in François Hollande’s position was such that some political analysts observed that there would be no “Jewish vote during the forthcoming presidential elections as far as the relations with Israel [were] concerned, since Hollande and Sarkozy both represent[ed] the pro-Israeli wing of their respective camp.”³⁹³ And although Sarkozy was more popular in Israel, where he beat overwhelmingly the Socialist candidate by collecting 92% of the votes of French-Israelis, Israel welcomed rather warmly the accession of Hollande to the Elysée, especially after he completed the composition of his team,³⁹⁴ appointing various sympathizers of Israel to key positions.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Quoted by Vidal, Dominique, “François Hollande et le conflit israélo-palestinien”, *Confluences méditerranées*, 2 April 2012, <http://www.confluences-mediterranee.com/Francois-Hollande-et-le-conflit>.

³⁹² The article reported that private donations from pro-Israel individuals to French candidates had amounted to one to two million USD, and that on the occasion of the French Socialist primaries one third of such donations had been directed to Hollande, judged as better disposed to Israel than his opponent within the Socialist Party Martine Aubry. These declarations seemed to be corroborated by other French media outlets, which underlined the relative opacity of the funding of the Socialist Party primaries and the particularly spendthrift campaign of Hollande, with a budget far superior to that of his competitors. After some time, the article including the testimony of ELNET founder Larry Hochberg disappeared from the *Jewish Journal* website. Hamza, Hicham, “Un lobby israélo-américain a financé François Hollande pour battre Martine Aubry”, *Panamza*, 28 February 2014, <http://www.panamza.com/280214-eln-net-hollande>.

³⁹³ Denis Charbit, Professor of Political Sciences at Tel Aviv University, quoted in Hamza, Hicham, “François Hollande: ‘Israël est très critiqué car c’est une grande démocratie’”, *Oumma.com*, 1 February 2012, <http://oumma.com/11024/francois-hollande-israel-est-tres-critique-car-cest-une-grande-democratie>.

³⁹⁴ Ravid, Barak, “Will France’s new president Francois Hollande be good for Israel?”, *Haaretz*, 7 May 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/diplomania/will-france-s-new-president-francois-hollande-be-good-for-israel-1.428781>.

³⁹⁵ For instance, he appointed Manuel Valls as minister of Interior (and later prime minister), a man who had

Francois Hollande's first presidential speech on French foreign policy epitomized how much, once in power, he disavowed his previous engagements, adopting a position judged by various observers as even more leveled with Israel than that of his predecessor.³⁹⁶ In the address he gave at the annual Conference of Ambassadors in August 2012, he only recognized the "right to self-determination of the Palestinian people" without mentioning the establishment of a Palestinian state, and insisted instead on the negotiations as the unique way to solve the issue of Palestine. Worst, in his speech he called for the resumption of talks "as soon as the Palestinians [had] abandoned a good number of their preconditions," giving the impression that they were the source of the impasse. Again, at the UNGA annual conference and during a visit of Benjamin Netanyahu to France in autumn 2012, Hollande echoed the Israeli rhetoric of the necessity of "a return – without preconditions – to negotiations" instead of the "unilateral" Palestinian diplomatic endeavors.³⁹⁷ If at the end of November he eventually decided, at the last-minute, to vote in favor of the new Palestinian bid requesting that Palestine's status be upgraded from "observer entity" to "non-member state," he reportedly did so reluctantly, compelled by a reversal of the situation on the ground seeing the rise of Hamas following a new Israeli attack on Gaza that same month, and after demanding scores of guarantees from President Abbas. In any case, Paris refused to successively give a clear political meaning to this vote by officially recognizing on a bilateral basis the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, as had already done more than 130 countries worldwide. Even the vote of French lawmakers in December 2014 in favor of a non-binding motion, put forward by the Socialist Party, urging the government to recognize Palestine as a state did not bring much closer the prospect of an official recognition of Palestine by

declared that through his Jewish wife "he was eternally linked to the Jewish community and to Israel," who had declared that he opposed the recognition of Palestine at the UN because it would "antagonize Israel," and who had argued repeatedly that anti-Zionism was a synonym of anti-Semitism (Cf. Hamza, Hicham, "Manuel Valls affirme son 'engagement absolu pour Israël'", Panamza, 13 September 2013, <http://www.panamza.com/11092013-valls-engagement-absolu-israel>). He also confirmed in his function at the head of the General Direction of Security and Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jacques Audibert, a Sarkozy former appointee viewed as pro-Israeli, and more generally seemed to share his predecessor's defiance of the traditional policy of the Quai d'Orsay, declaring in front of representatives of the CRIF in 2005: "There is a trend that goes way back, this is called the Arab policy of France, and it is not acceptable for a government to have an ideology. There is a recruitment problem at the Quai d'Orsay and at the ENA [National School of Administration, where senior civil servants are trained] and this recruitment should be reorganized" (Quoted in Meyssan, Thierry, "François Hollande, Zionist Always", Voltaire Network, 26 November 2013, <http://www.voltairenet.org/article181169.html>).

³⁹⁶ Boniface, Pascal, "Conflit au Proche-Orient. Les pro-palestiniens déçus par François Hollande", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 2012, <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/621582-les-pro-palestiniens-decus-par-hollande.html>.

³⁹⁷ Quoted in Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS), "Hollande déroule le tapis rouge à Netanyahou...", 1 November 2012, <http://www.france-palestine.org/Hollande-deroule-le-tapis-rouge-a>.

France. The vote, which followed similar initiatives throughout Europe,³⁹⁸ was mostly symbolic. Besides, it was seen by some political analysts as an electioneering maneuver meant to regain the adhesion of leftist and popular strata of the French electorate, particularly shocked by the reaction of the French president to another deadly Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in the summer 2014.³⁹⁹ The concomitant announcement that the French government would make a last attempt to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through negotiations before recognizing the State of Palestine, even if progressive in that it apparently agreed on a two-year deadline for a final settlement as requested by Mahmoud Abbas, was for many another way to postpone the Palestinians' right to self-determination and give the Israelis more time for settlement building, while "maintaining the illusion of a peace process"⁴⁰⁰ (and depriving Palestinians of the important leverage of the 1967 lines as a basis for negotiations).

On the other hand, the French administration continued to refuse to put any meaningful pressure on Israel, even pursuing the judiciary crackdown on French BDS activists started by Nicolas Sarkozy. Hollande, who in November 2010 had been signatory of a call published in *Le Monde* under the title "The boycott of Israel is a shameful weapon," reiterated the orders to the French judicial authorities given in the Alliot-Marie circular,⁴⁰¹ thereby continuing to make France the only European country to consider a call for boycott as a criminal act.⁴⁰² Moreover, his government appeared to lag behind some of its European counterparts when some timid steps against Israeli settlement goods were starting to be taken on the continent, especially after

³⁹⁸ Including the first official recognition of the State of Palestine by an EU country, Sweden, on 30 October 2014.

³⁹⁹ After initially condoning the Israeli "right to defend itself," abstaining on a resolution of the UN Human Rights Council requesting the opening of an international investigation on the human rights and humanitarian law abuses committed in Gaza (unwanted by Israel), and even forbidding demonstrations of support for Gaza in France, the French authorities made some pretence of rebalancing their position when Israeli violations became too conspicuous, with Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius declaring that Israel's right to security "does not justify the killing of children and the massacre of civilians."

⁴⁰⁰ The political analyst Jean-François Legrain quoted in Puchot, Pierre, "Palestine : la reconnaissance et après ?", *Mediapart*, 5 Decembre 2014, <http://www.france-palestine.org/Palestine-la-reconnaissance-et>.

The French diplomatic drive took place in the framework of a new initiative by President Abbas, with the backing of the Arab League, to call for a vote at the UNSC asking for an Israeli withdrawal by November 2016 from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and for the immediate acceptance of Palestine as a full UN member. The French, who declared that they could agree on the set timeframe, were reportedly working with their British and German partners on an alternative UNSC resolution meant to counterweight the Palestinian draft and thereby avoid American veto. According to media leaks, the European text had failed to win the support of the Palestinians so far (at the date of writing).

⁴⁰¹ Cf. footnote 363.

⁴⁰² Abunimah, Ali, "New French president says boycott of Israeli goods 'illegal,' but Paris court acquits more BDS activists", 5 July 2012, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/new-french-president-says-boycott-israeli-goods-illegal-paris-court-acquits-more>.

the publication of a NGOs report revealing that European imports from Israeli colonies, labeled “Made in Israel,” were at least 15 times greater than the union’s imports of Palestinian products.⁴⁰³ For example, instead of issuing directives requesting retailers to use a differentiated labeling for products made in Israeli colonies, as the UK and the Netherlands had done, Paris merely asked in April 2013 that Brussels itself take such a measure, yet knowing that it would necessitate a much longer administrative process.⁴⁰⁴ And when in July the EU at last went a step further by issuing guidelines banning the funding of, and cooperation with, Israeli institutions that operate in occupied Palestinian territories – in order, critics said, to avert demands for a more comprehensive boycott of Israeli products – France’s position was ambiguous to say the least. While initially upholding the move, the French government seemed to quickly withdraw its support and disavow the guidelines: in a press conference given during a trip to the region in August 2013, after meeting several Israeli officials demanding the cancellation of the directives, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius declared that “if the spirit of those guidelines was legitimate, their wording deserved to be modified.” As a matter of fact, they were almost totally drained of their substance a few months later as a result of the negotiations which subsequently opened between Israel and the EU, with the latter eventually agreeing that it would not impose a blanket ban on financial aid to Israeli entities operating in colonies as the original wording would have compelled it to.⁴⁰⁵ The role played by France in this watering down of the initial guidelines is

⁴⁰³ “Trading Away Peace. How Europe helps sustain illegal Israeli settlements”, 30 October 2012, http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/trading_away_peace_-_embargoed_copy_of_designed_report.pdf.

⁴⁰⁴ Plateforme des ONG françaises pour la Palestine, “Produits des colonies israéliennes, la France se prononce pour l’étiquetage mais s’abrite derrière l’UE”, 24 April 2013, <http://plateforme-palestine.org/Produits-des-colonies-israeliennes,3665>

⁴⁰⁵ Sheizaf, Noam, “Report: EU to bypass its own anti-settlements guidelines”, *+972 Magazine*, 17 October 2013, <http://972mag.com/report-eu-to-bypass-its-own-anti-settlements-guidelines/80521/>. The new draft of the guidelines would have stated that “only Israeli entities having their place of establishment within Israel’s pre-1967 borders will be considered eligible for consideration,” but the place of establishment was merely understood to be “the legal address where the entity is registered.” Besides, the reached compromise required that Israeli applicants themselves submit a declaration stating that they had no direct or indirect links to occupied lands, and that it would be up to them to bring the proof that EU funds would not finance settlement activities. According to an article published in the Hebrew daily *Maariv*, the new formulation of the guidelines would also allow Israeli entities to redirect and invest the EU funds to companies located in the settlements via subsidiaries and affiliates while receiving the European subsidies in their main operating budget. Also, while the initial draft obliged Israel to recognize in writing in any future EU agreements that the settlements were not part of the Israeli State, the two sides eventually agreed that in the framework of the Horizon 2020 agreement – a prestigious and particularly bountiful scientific research program highly coveted by Israel – it would fall on the EU to add a clause specifying that research funds would not serve institutions located in lands seized during the 1967 War, while Israel would include another clause saying that it did not recognize the new EU guidelines, thereby voiding them of their spirit. In other words, not only did the deal make Israel the only non-European nation authorized to participate in one of the most important EU scientific cooperation program (eventually signed in June 2014), it also allowed firms profiting from the occupation to continue benefiting from EU grants.

anyone's guess, but thinking that Hollande's administration stood up against Israeli pressures is open to doubt, as would seem to confirm the French president's contemporaneous declarations in front of the Israeli parliament.

Indeed, in the Knesset in November 2013, not only did François Hollande call for greater cooperation with Israel,⁴⁰⁶ but he focused his speech on Iran, Netanyahu's bogeyman, and relegated the Israeli-Palestinian issue to a few sentences at the very end, merely content with repeating France's known position of support for "a negotiated solution for the State of Israel and the State of Palestine," without mentioning the 1967 borders as a starting point for the talks as even Nicolas Sarkozy had done. As a matter of fact, some of Hollande's declarations during his trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories,⁴⁰⁷ together with his hawkish position on the Iranian file⁴⁰⁸ and his approval of closer military cooperation between France and Israel⁴⁰⁹ made some commentators point out that the relations between Paris and Tel Aviv had gone back to what they were in 1956 when the Socialist government of Guy Mollet was sealing an alliance with Israel against Egypt in the Suez War.⁴¹⁰ As the French president himself told Netanyahu the night before his Knesset address at an official dinner given in his honor at the premier's residence, during which he declared his "love for Israel and its leaders," the two countries "could only see *la vie en rose* [life through rose-tinted spectacles]."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ "There are not enough commercial exchanges between our two countries, and we should do more," he said. "We have chosen to make innovation and new technology central to our cooperation. We have decided to relaunch the France-Israel High Council for Scientific and Technological Cooperation."

⁴⁰⁷ For instance urging Palestinians to be "flexible" on the refugees' right of return in exchange for Israeli settlement freeze, or declining to officially consider violent settlers as terrorists, alleging that the terminology was not appropriate (this was contradicted by the last US State Department Country Report on Terrorism which included Jewish extremism against Palestinians).

⁴⁰⁸ Paris was accused of playing a negative role during the negotiations on the issue held in Geneva in November 2012. While a deal was in sight, Fabius reportedly stepped up to request, like Netanyahu, that Iran renounce the enrichment of uranium, a demand that all knew to be unacceptable by Tehran. Gresh, Alain, "Nucléaire iranien, la France s'oppose à une solution", 10 November 2013, <http://blog.mondediplo.net/2013-11-10-Nucleaire-iranien-la-France-s-oppose-a-une>.

⁴⁰⁹ Representatives of the arms-maker Thales accompanied François Hollande in his visit to Israel. Cronin, David, "Arms dealers sniff opportunities as French president visits Israel", The Electronic Intifada, 15 November 2013, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/david-cronin/arms-dealers-sniff-opportunities-french-president-visits-israel>.

⁴¹⁰ Gresh, Alain, "Stéphane Hessel, François Hollande et la Palestine", *Le Monde diplomatique*, 8 March 2013, <http://blog.mondediplo.net/2013-03-08-Stephane-Hessel-Francois-Hollande-et-la-Palestine>.

⁴¹¹ At the end of the dinner, following the performance of Mike Brant's song "Laisse-moi t'aimer" by an Israeli singer, Hollande said jokingly: "If I had been told that I would come to Israel and that in addition to doing diplomacy and politics I would have had to sing, I would have done it, for the friendship between Benjamin and myself, for Israel and for France. Although I cannot sing, I would have found a love song for Israel and its leaders [...] Now we can only see life through rose-tinted spectacles." Cf. Hamza, Hicham, "François Hollande se dit prêt à entonner 'un chant d'amour pour Israël et ses dirigeants'", *Panamza*, 25 November 2013, <http://www.panamza.com/18112013-francois-hollande-chant-damour-israel> (video).



François Hollande and Benjamin Netanyahu, November 2013 © PANAMZA

Lip Service to Jerusalem

The French president, described by a diplomat as “not particularly knowledgeable on the issue of Jerusalem” but “appreciative of its importance,” seemed, on this subject also, not to be willing to take any steps likely to disturb Israeli leaders and their supporters. For instance, while his party’s June 2011 note calling for the recognition of a Palestinian state had clearly stated that Jerusalem had “vocation to be the capital of the two states”, the issue had successively been wiped out of his political program as candidate,⁴¹² and Hollande had been careful in avoiding expressing any contentious stance on the matter. If in the Knesset in November 2013 he could not fail to mention, like his predecessor, the objective of Jerusalem as “capital of both states,” he stressed that it had to be achieved through a “negotiated settlement.” And if during his stay he made the symbolic

⁴¹² Hecker, Marc, “Sarkozy et Israël : le syndrome Mitterrand”, *Le Monde*, 10 January 2012, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/01/10/sarkozy-et-israel-le-syndrome-mitterrand_1627524_3232.html.

gesture of holding a meeting with a small committee of Palestinian religious dignitaries and members of the civil society within the Old City, in the French domain of Saint Anne Church, the comments he expressed on that occasion on the status of Jerusalem seemed even more timid. He declared that the city “must become the capital of two states *if* the negotiations succeed, *if* a peace agreement is found,”⁴¹³ as if in the meantime the *status quo* of Israeli occupation, annexation and ever growing colonization and Judaization was acceptable.

As a matter of fact, although another report of the European chiefs of missions in Jerusalem was warning that “if the implementation of the current Israeli policy continues, in particular settlement building, the prospect of Jerusalem as future capital of the two states will become almost impracticable,” Hollande’s administration seemed indisposed to take any concrete countering measures except for the issuance of occasional communiqués of condemnation. A case in point was the aftermath of the upgrade of Palestine’s status at the UN in November 2012, when Israel defiantly retaliated by announcing the building of another 1,500 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the acceleration of the development of the so-called E-1 plan intended to cut off the city from the remaining Palestinian territories.⁴¹⁴ François Hollande, who at the time was hosting Netanyahu in France, only declared himself “preoccupied,” and “hoping that the step would not be contrary to dialogue.” And although Paris, like some other European capitals, summoned the Israeli ambassador to convey its disapproval, Hollande quickly brushed aside the possibility of recalling the French ambassador to Israel in protest, unwilling to “shift into sanctions mode” and preferring instead to “focus on persuading.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Revault d'Allonnes, David, “A Ramallah, Hollande rassure les Palestiniens,” *Le Monde*, 18 November 2013. http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2013/11/18/a-ramallah-francois-hollande-rassure-les-palestiniens_3515646_3218.html.

⁴¹⁴ The so-called East 1 (E-1) plan is meant to split the West Bank into two along an East-West axis and cut off East Jerusalem from the remaining Palestinian territories. Settlement-building in this strategic area is considered by many, including the US and the EU, as a red line not to be crossed in order to safeguard the two-state solution.

⁴¹⁵ Ravid, Barak, “U.S., Europe censure Israel for plan to ramp up construction,” *Haaretz*, 4 December 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/u-s-europe-censure-israel-for-plan-to-ramp-up-construction-1.482209>

Chapter Nine

France in Jerusalem Today

The “French Jerusalem:” France’s Legacy in the City

The French Republic is the sole secular state to possess “national domains” in and around Jerusalem which benefit from a status of quasi-extraterritoriality.⁴¹⁶ The oldest and probably most prestigious of them is Saint Anne Church, offered to Napoleon III by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Majid in 1856 in appreciation for his assistance against Russia during the Crimean War. Situated in the Old City, at the beginning of Via Dolorosa, this exquisite Roman-style church built over the site regarded as the birthplace of Virgin Mary is the best-preserved Crusader edifice of the city, partly because, unlike other churches in Jerusalem, Saint Anne was not destroyed after the Muslim conquest in 1189 but instead turned into a *madrasa* by Sultan Salah Ad-Din (whose name



Saint Anne Church, Jerusalem

⁴¹⁶ The ecclesiastical Vatican City State also possesses domains enjoying such a status. Source: Consulate General of France in Jerusalem.

NB: Contrary to common belief, the Israeli settlement of “French Hill” in northern East Jerusalem has nothing to do with France but derives its name from a British general, John French, said to have had his headquarters on that hill.

appears in the Arabic inscription above the main entrance). In addition to the church, the domain includes the remnants of the Bethesda Pool where Jesus is believed to have cured a paralytic man, the ruins of a Byzantine basilica destroyed in the 11th Century, and the tombs of two former French consuls general. It is managed by the White Fathers.

The second property is the Eleona (from the Greek word “eliaon,” i.e. olive), a contemplative community located on the Mount of Olives with an exceptional view on Jerusalem. According to tradition, it is the place where Christ taught the Pater Noster prayer to his disciples. On that location stood one of the three greatest Byzantine basilicas of the Holy Land (the other two being the Holy Sepulcher Church and the Nativity Church). It was offered to France by the Princess of La Tour d’Auvergne in 1868 and encloses the Pater Grotto and a collection of mosaics featuring more than 170 translations of the Pater prayer. The site is operated by the Carmelites and White Fathers.

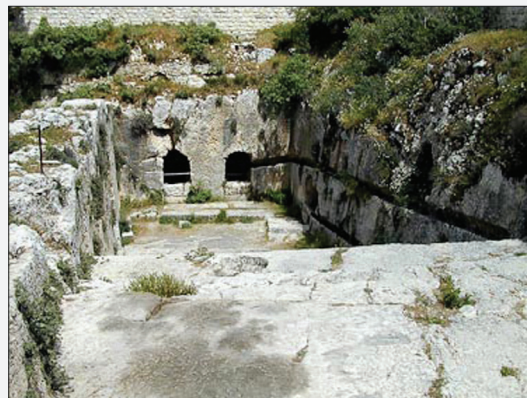


Sanctuary of the Eleona (also known as the Church of the Pater Noster), Jerusalem

Another site is the Tombs of the Kings acquired by the Péreire brothers, famous French bankers, who offered it to the state in 1886 “to keep it for science and the veneration of the faithful children of Israel.”⁴¹⁷ It comprises a monumental mausoleum dug into the rock which shelters 31 tombs, some of which are currently displayed at the Louvre Museum in Paris. The grandeur of the site led to the erroneous belief that the tombs had once been the burial place of the kings of Judah, hence the name. It is now known that they belong to members of the dynasty of Helena of Adiabene, an Assyrian princess of the 1st Century CE who converted to Judaism.



Pater Noster prayer in French



Tombs of the Kings, Jerusalem

⁴¹⁷ Quoted in Jaulmes, Adrien, “La France, gardienne des lieux saints”, *Le Figaro*, 13 September 2010, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2010/09/13/01003-20100913ARTFIG00729-la-france-gardienne-des-lieux-saints.php>.

A fourth estate is situated in the immediate vicinity of the city, in the Palestinian village of Abu Ghosh, now located on the Israeli side of the Green Line (the 1949 armistice lines established between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the aftermath of the 1948 War). The property consists of a Crusader church (Saint Mary of the Resurrection Abbey), possibly the second most beautiful example of Crusader ecclesiastical architecture in the Holy Land after Saint Anne Church. It was built on one of the three supposed locations of the miracle of Emmaus mentioned in the Gospel (apparition of Christ to his disciples on the way to Emmaus). It was bestowed to France by the Ottoman Empire in 1873 in compensation for the appropriation of the church of Saint Georges in Lydda (Lod) by the Greek Orthodox in violation of the *status quo*. The site is run by the Olivetan Benedictines community. The French consulate general in Jerusalem is responsible for the caretaking, maintenance, restoration and valorization of these estates which are not only precious testimonies of Jerusalem's history but also holy sites visited by some 300,000 pilgrims each year.⁴¹⁸



Saint Mary of the Resurrection Abbey, Abu Ghosh

Other strong architectural symbols of the French presence in Jerusalem are Saint Louis Hospital and Notre Dame of Jerusalem, situated right outside the Old City. Both were erected in the context of the building boom of the late 19th Century, when world powers were competing among themselves to assert their influence in the city through the construction of majestic Christian edifices. Like other nations at the time, France wanted to develop a French neighborhood in Je-

⁴¹⁸ Logically, Abu Ghosh domain should be under the jurisdiction of the French embassy in Tel Aviv but owing to an amicable agreement with Israel it is under the authority of the French Consulate General in Jerusalem. *Vice versa*, some French institutions and services in Jerusalem are managed by the embassy in Tel Aviv since they deal with Israeli affairs (e.g. the Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem CRFJ or volunteering programs at the Hebrew University). Mochon, *op. cit.*

rusalem, strategically located between the already existing Russian Compound and the Old City in an attempt to halt the rapid advance of the Russians and create an obstacle between the Saint Sepulcher Church and those “schismatics”.⁴¹⁹ The first construction of this “French quarter” – a denomination which never took root unlike that of its rivals (e.g. the “German” and “American” colonies) – was Saint Louis Hospital, named after the French King Saint Louis IX who led the 7th Crusade in the mid-13th Century. Founded in 1879 by the French consulate in a small private house of the Old City, in 1882 the hospital was moved *extra muros* into new premises built by Count Amédée de Piellat, a young French nobleman, intellectual, entrepreneur, and artist inspired by religious and patriotic zeal.⁴²⁰ The building faces the New Gate, specifically opened in the Old City’s walls in 1889 by the Ottomans on the request of France to facilitate access to the hospital from within the city, and enhance the country’s prestige via a direct entrance to its



Saint Louis Hospital, Jerusalem

⁴¹⁹ Trimbur, Dominique, “A French Presence in Palestine – Notre-Dame de France”, *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, No. 3, 1998, <http://bcfrj.revues.org/4122>.

⁴²⁰ Ambroselli, Myriam, “L’Hôpital Saint-Louis : au-delà des clivages”, *Aviv.fr*, 22 November 2009, <http://www.aviv.fr/revue-de-presse/article-de-presse/1224-l-hopital-saint-louis-au-dela-des-clivages>.

Christian Quarter. This large edifice, whose Renaissance and Baroque architecture, with its white stones and blue shutters, evokes convents built in France at the same epoch, is administered by the French congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, the first foreign female religious community that was established in Palestine in 1848. Its initial vocation to care for all those in need, whatever their creed, is perpetuated to this day with a multi-faith staff attending to patients of all religions and origins.⁴²¹ During the 1948 War and the period of partition of Jerusalem, the hospital found itself on the Israeli side, no longer accessible to the residents of the east. In 1956, to meet the needs of Palestinians prevented from crossing the Green Line (that divided Jerusalem until 1967 as per the 1949 Israeli-Jordanian Armistice Agreement) another hospital (Saint Joseph) was built in the Arab sector of the city, in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Saint Louis specialized in oncology; it is now dedicated to terminal care.



Saint Louis Hospital, Jerusalem

⁴²¹ In 2007, the hospital was granted the Mount Zion Award for Reconciliation.

The successive element that came to compose the “quartier français,” surpassing its predecessor by its grandeur, was Notre Dame de France. The imposing building was founded to meet the accommodation needs of increasing numbers of French pilgrims in the Holy Land, and also to serve as a seminary for members of the Assumptionist order who used to rule the place. It was also a center for scientific research as desired by its first superior, the archeologist Father Germer-Durand, who launched and supervised high-quality publications and opened in the premises an acclaimed museum. The edifice is located right besides Saint Louis Hospital, on a plot of land purchased by Count de Piellat at the spot where the first Crusaders camp was erected in 1099.⁴²²



Wall paintings by Amédée de Piellat inside Saint Louis Hospital

When the hostel was completed in 1896, it could host nearly 600 people, becoming the largest of all French institutions in Jerusalem, and dominating the Old City from its highest topographic point. The architecture of this elegant monument combines French influence (it bears similarities with Notre Dame de la Garde Church in Marseilles for instance) and oriental inspiration, as illustrated by the stones of alternating colors and the large use of mosaics. Furthermore, the style of the edifice reflects the colonial spirit of the time, when foreign countries desired to change the physiognomy of the city by topping each of their national building with ever more impressive towers and bells.⁴²³ Not only was Notre Dame de France endowed with two towers, one which used to fly the French flag and another ornamented with bells, but its façade includes the largest statue of the Virgin Mary in Ottoman lands at the time of its edification, a replica of Our Lady of

⁴²² Trimbur, “A French Presence in Palestine – Notre-Dame de France”, *op. cit.*

⁴²³ *Ibidem.*

Salvation in Paris. However, due to its size and its strategic location at one of the main intersections between the Old and the New City, the “French hostel,” as it was known, became a prime victim of wartime activity: it was turned into a respite area for the Turkish troops during World War I, lodged soldiers of the French detachment to Palestine and Syria on mission to protect the holy sites between 1918 and 1920, and was requisitioned by the British authorities before and during World War II. Then during the first Israeli-Arab War of 1948 it suffered major damages, including the nearly complete destruction of the museum, and between 1948 and 1967 it was occupied by Israeli troops, which partially transformed it into a border post.⁴²⁴ Eventually, its occupation by numerous refugees, the greatly reduced numbers of faithful pilgrims, and prohibitive maintenance costs all prompted the Assumptionists to sell the building to the Hebrew University at the end of the 1960s to be made a dormitory for students. The initiative was opposed by the Vatican, which took possession of the building in March 1972, changing its name from “Notre Dame de France” to “Notre Dame de Jerusalem.” Thus, after having symbolized the prestige of France in the city, the edifice became the mirror of its loss of influence.⁴²⁵ Since then, it has been turned into the Holy See’s International Pilgrim Center, and was officially promulgated as a Pontifical Institute on 27 December 1978.⁴²⁶ Today, in addition to a hotel for pilgrims and tourists, the place serves as an ecumenical and pastoral center for Jerusalem Christians, a professional promotion center for local Palestinian youth, and hosts a permanent exhibition on the “Shroud of Turin.”

Since the intention of many pilgrims of the time was to settle in Jerusalem definitively, the first superior of Notre Dame de France suggested purchasing a new plot of land to be turned into a French burial place. In 1887, the domain of Saint Peter in Gallicantu on the eastern slope of Mount Zion was purchased to that end, and in 1892 a cemetery was dedicated. Later, the so-called Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu was constructed in an adjacent location. It formed an annex to Notre Dame de France, and still belongs to the Assumptionists. The church takes its name from the Latin “Gallus cantat” (i.e. “the cock crows”), recalling Jesus’ prediction to Peter: “Before the cock crows tonight you will deny me three times.” A Byzantine shrine dedicated to Peter’s repentance was erected on this spot in 457 AD, but was destroyed by the Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah in 1010. The chapel was rebuilt by the Crusaders in 1102. The present monastery, inaugurated in 1931, was built by Fr. Etienne Boubet, who was also responsible for the mosaics

⁴²⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁴²⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁴²⁶ Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, official website.



Notre Dame of Jerusalem, formerly “Notre Dame de France”

illustrating scenes of Jesus’ life. Father Boubet, who also designed the Church of Notre Dame de France, headed numerous projects and French constructions in the city and the surrounding area, such as the Latrun Monastery, the chapel of the 4th station on the Via Dolorosa, the plan of the Hortus Conclusus Convent in the village of Artas, the Monks’ Chapel in Bethlehem, and the Abu Ghosh Convent.

In 1911, the “French quarter” was completed, forming – with the new French consulate general, the Church and Hospice of Saint Vincent de Paul (now located in the Israeli Mamilla Mall area), and the convent of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix – an important religious, political and civil complex. The Sisters of Mary Reparatrix Convent, which included the chapel of Sainte Croix and a cloister, no longer exists. Situated opposite Saint Louis Hospital, adjacent to the New Gate, it



Saint Peter in Gallicantu, Jerusalem

was seriously damaged during the 1948 fighting, was left abandoned in the “no man’s land” until 1967, and eventually dismantled and leveled by the Israeli authorities after the 1967 War.⁴²⁷ The remains of the convent and the surrounding buildings were uncovered in two digs conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority as part of the Jerusalem light rail project in 2005 and 2008. The foundations of the buildings, the floors of the Chapel of Sainte Croix, and the cistern and sewage were unearthed.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Finkielstejn, Gérald/Nagar, Annette/Avner, Rina/Bilig, Yaacov, “The Convent Outside the New Gate that Saved West Jerusalem (1894-1948)”, Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies, Bar-Ilan University, New Studies on Jerusalem, Vol. 16, December 2010, http://www.academia.edu/2624852/The_Convent_Outside_the_New_Gate_that_Saved_West_Jerusalem_1894-1948_.

⁴²⁸ Hasson, Nir, “19th-Century convent uncovered during work on Jerusalem railway”, *Haaretz*, 4 June 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/19th-century-convent-uncovered-during-work-on-jerusalem-railway-1.294116>.



The façade of the convent of the sisters of Mary Reparatrix with the chapel of Sainte-Croix in the 1930s
© Matson collection – Congress Library



The eastern end of the convent after the 1948 War
© Sisters of Mary Reparatrix

French Architects in Jerusalem

In addition to ensuring the maintenance of its own properties and those possessed by its protected religious communities, France has contributed to preserving the architectural magnificence of Jerusalem through the funding of renovation projects and the commissioning of some of its best architects to rehabilitation works. Most prominent among them were Christophe Mauss and Charles Coüasnon. After being sent to Jerusalem in 1862 to restore Saint Anne Church, the former was chosen by the French government in 1867 to repair the large cupola of the Holy Sepulcher Church (together with the Russian architect Eppinger). Once the work was completed, Mauss achieved the renovation of Saint Anne where he discovered in 1873 the Bethesda Pool mentioned in the Gospels. He also participated in the architectural study of the Haram Ash-Sharif with Saulcy and Salzmänn, and in the rehabilitation of Abu Gosh Church.

A century later, in 1950, Father Charles Coüasnon joined the Ecole biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem to participate in diggings in Tell Al-Farah under the direction of Roland de Vaux. In 1959, after an agreement was reached for the complete renovation of the Holy Sepulcher Church, Father Coüasnon was selected by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land to lead the works on behalf of the Latins. The restoration, which lasted for more than 20 years, is regarded as an outstanding achievement. Father Coüasnon also worked on the rehabilitation of the French domains of Saint Anne and Abu Ghosh, and published an important architectural study, *The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem*.*

* IFPO/EBAF, op. cit.

N.B.: Outside Jerusalem, France contributed – this time only financially – to the restoration of Bethlehem Nativity Church, being the first foreign donor with a 200,000 Euros donation. The renovation had been made impossible for two centuries by the disagreements between the Latin, Greek Orthodox, and Apostolic Armenian Churches that share responsibility for the site regarding the restoration of the roof (since the status quo failed to mention specifically to whom the ceiling of the building belongs). In 2008, the basilica was inserted in the list of the 100 most endangered sites of the World Monuments Watch, and in 2010 the PNA managed to persuade the three patriarchs to eventually sign a historic agreement for the reparation of the roof. Teyssier Yves, “L’action de la France en faveur du patrimoine chrétien en Terre Sainte”, *L’Œuvre d’Orient*, 6 February 2014, <http://www.oeuvre-orient.fr/2014/02/11/laction-de-la-france-en-faveur-du-patrimoine-chretien-en-terre-sainte-yves-teyssier-dorfeuil-2014/>.

Last but not least, France's cultural presence in Jerusalem is also conveyed by its scientific contribution to biblical and archeological studies via the Ecole biblique et archéologique française, administered by Dominican priests. It is located on Nablus Road in East Jerusalem, within the compound of the Saint Stephen Monastery which was erected in 1884 where once stood a Byzantine basilica built in circa 430 CE by Empress Eudocia to commemorate the martyrdom of Saint Stephen. Founded as L'Ecole pratique d'études bibliques in 1890 by Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange, it was the first research institute established permanently in the city.⁴²⁹ Since its creation, the school has been involved in the exegesis of biblical text, and has carried out archaeological research in Palestine and the adjacent territories. Its main disciplines are epigraphy, Semitic languages, Assyriology, Egyptology, and other aspects of ancient history, geography, and ethnography. It took its current name in 1920, following its recognition by the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres as a national archaeological school on account of the quality of its work in this field. In 1983, the Pontifical Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome granted l'Ecole biblique the right to confer the degree of Doctor of Biblical Sciences. One of its most esteemed achievements is the so-called Jerusalem Bible, a piece of work issued in 1956 that stands out for its translational rigor, its literary quality, and the beauty and novelty of its layout which inspired successive modern bibles.⁴³⁰ In addition to its publications, l'Ecole biblique possesses an exceptional photographic collection, one of the richest in the world, which has been accumulated over a century of archeological, epigraphic and ethnographic explorations across historic Palestine and the surrounding lands, and forms today a unique testimony of the monuments and landscapes of the past. Last, it hosts an outstanding library of more than 140,000 volumes and 400 specialized periodicals concerned essentially with biblical exegesis, the archeology and literature of the Near East, and ancient languages, in addition to including an important collection of maps and topographical charts. Regrettably, the library is not open to the general public, and access for outside users is restricted to professors and students engaged in high-level academic research.

⁴²⁹ Ecole biblique et archéologique française, <http://www.ebaf.info/>.

⁴³⁰ *Ibidem*.



Ecole biblique et archéologique française, Jerusalem



In the front: remains of the Eudocia Basilica; in the back: the former slaughterhouse which was transformed into a convent and accommodated the school at its creation © EBAF

The “Jerusalems” of France

During medieval times, many localities and holy places throughout Europe took the name of Jerusalem. They were founded by returning Crusaders, pilgrims, or those who had not been able to make the trip to Palestine. France, too, possesses several sites named after the Holy City, such as small residential areas in La Roche-Rigault, northwest of Poitiers, in Juaye-Mondaye, near Caen, in Quincieux, north of Lyon, or in the feudal city of Saint-Vérain in Burgundy, where the ruins of a “Jerusalem” Castle can also be found.

More recently, in 1963, a private chapel was consecrated under the name “Notre Dame of Jerusalem.” Its erection was ordered by a French banker, Jean Martinon, for the residents of a neighborhood of the Mediterranean city of Fréjus, which he had imagined as an “ideal city” to accommodate a population of artists. Martinon asked the French poet, novelist, designer, and playwright Jean Cocteau to design the shrine, in collaboration with the architect Jean Triquenot. However Cocteau died in October of that year, and the decoration of the chapel had to be completed by his adoptive son, Edouard Dermit, on the basis of the sketches he had left.



Notre Dame of Jerusalem Chapel, diocese of Fréjus-Toulon, south of France



Decorations inside the chapel made out of sketches prepared by Jean Cocteau

“God Save the Republic”

France’s architectural heritage in Jerusalem is not the only testimony of its past role as protector of the Christians in the Levant. Another crucial dimension is precisely the partial continuation of that protection in the present days. This is so in virtue of the agreements signed with the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th Century (the Mytilène Agreement of 1901 and the Constantinople Agreement of 1913), which after being annulled by Article 8 of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, were re-established by Israel in 1948-49 through the Fischer-Chauvel exchange of letters, and confirmed in 1997 by the PNA. Although the French religious protectorate is not as central as it was in the past, it remains fundamental – as incongruous as it may be considering that France is one of the world’s most secular nation-states. Thus the French consul general in Jerusalem is invested with a mission of protection of the religious institutions that were legally recognized as being under the French protectorate in those agreements. In parallel, it continues to benefit from many of the liturgical honors inherited from the past, which were codified in a convention ratified in December 1926 by Mgr. Luigi Maglione, Apostolic Nuncio in France, and the Socialist – and anti-clerical – Minister of Foreign Affairs Aristide Briand. For instance, the assumption of duties of each new consul general in the city follows a highly honorific ceremonial including a solemn visit to the Holy Sepulcher Church. In uniform, preceded by two *carwas* (the traditional guards dressed in Ottoman outfit), he walks through the Old City until he reaches the church’s forecourt where he is received by the Custos of the Holy Land. The French consul general is the only foreign diplomat enjoying such a privilege.⁴³¹ Then he proceeds to the Church of Saint Anne, where he is presented with holy water and the Gospel and is honored by a “Te Deum” [We Praise You] prayer. The celebration ends with another prayer in Latin, the “Domine Salva Fac Republicam” [God Save the Republic]. Further to the liturgical honors given during his investiture ceremony, the highest representative of France in Jerusalem is also reserved a seat at the front row, alongside the consuls of the other “catholic powers” (Italy, Spain and Belgium), during Easter celebrations at the Holy Sepulcher Church and the Christmas midnight mass at the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. But the most paradoxical of these relics of France’s past religious role in the Holy Land are the so-called “consular masses,” around 30 church services celebrated “in the name of France” each year, including most incongruously on Bastille Day, the national day celebrating the French Revolution.

⁴³¹ Jaulmes, *op. cit.*



Assumption of duties of Consul Hervé Magro, Jerusalem, September 2013 © Nadim Asfour/Custodie de Terre Sainte

Despite the somewhat antiquated nature of these traditions and prerogatives, they attest to the sway that France continues to enjoy in the city. More concretely, this influence is expressed through the support that the French authorities provide to the 120 religious institutions formally placed under its protectorate. Around 40 of them are of direct French origins (although French personnel are few nowadays) and the rest are communities of Latin or Eastern rites which used to be linked to France in some way or another. They are gathered around a variety of establishments, including hospitals, free health centers, hospices, orphanages, contemplative orders, seminars, pilgrim houses, schools and higher education institutes. In the sole district of Jerusalem, they involve around 400 individuals.⁴³² To take care of these communities, Paris appoints a

⁴³² The religious communities under the protection of France in Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings include: communities established on holy sites (the White Fathers of Saint Anne, the Assumptionists of Saint Peter in Gallicantu, the Franciscans of the Custody on the sites of the Holy Sepulcher, the Flagellation, Gethsemane, the Cenacle, Dominus Flevit, Bethphage, Bethany, Ein Karem, and the Sisters of Zion and the Community of Chemin Neuf in the Convent of the Ecce Homo on Via Dolorosa), contemplative orders (e.g. Carmelites of Mount Pater, Benedictines of Notre Dame of Calvary, Little sisters and brothers of Jesus, Benedictines of Mount Olivet), schools (e.g. Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, Sisters of Rosaries, Brothers of the Christian School of the Old City), higher education institutes (e.g. Dominicans of the École biblique et archéologique française, Franciscan Studium of the Flagellation, Franciscan seminary of the Custodian Convent of Saint Savior), hospitals, free health centers and orphanages (e.g. Sisters of Notre Dame of Sorrows in Abu Dis, Saint Joseph Hospital of the Sisters of Saint

special Adviser for Religious Affairs who is a permanent staff of the diplomatic chancellery of the consulate general in Jerusalem, making it the only French diplomatic mission in the world – with the exception of the Vatican City State – provided with such a post. However, as always in the Palestinian context, this “religious” mission is in reality highly political: in addition to providing those religious congregations with financial assistance and counseling in the management of their internal affairs whenever needed, the French consulate general plays an important role of administrative and legal support in their dealings with the Israeli administration, which sometimes prove particularly difficult. In violation of the Fischer-Chauvel agreements, the Israeli authorities often aim to put pressure on these communities in order to provoke their departure from lands and properties it covets, including via direct expropriation orders. In particular, they contest the tax exemptions conferred on these religious communities, arguing that some of them are anachronistic in that they were not included in the original Ottoman accords, such as exemptions from airport or garbage collection taxes. For Israel, the total exemption from property and residence taxes is no longer pertinent since it was justified on the ground of the religious mission of the sites occupied by these communities, whereas nowadays some of them, to ensure their financial survival, have developed annex commercial services (e.g. accommodation and catering) which in some cases have exceeded and altered their initial vocation.

Careful attention is also paid to France’s national properties in the city, especially that the status of the French estate and its deeds of property have been regularly questioned by Israel since its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967.⁴³³ The most contentious site is the Tombs of the Kings, with groups of Orthodox Jews opposing the possession by a foreign nation of a mausoleum they attribute to Jewish biblical kings, and protesting vehemently when the French consulate general organizes in the premises “profane” events such as musical festivals, all the more so as they address primarily a Palestinian audience. To protect the site, the French consulate is maintaining a low profile, avoiding holding any such celebrations, and keeping it closed to the public by carrying out long-lasting (and not absolutely indispensable according to insiders) archeological works. The

Joseph of the Apparition in Sheikh Jarrah, Saint Vincent in Ein Karem, the Missionaries of Charity in the Old City, the Sisters of Sainte Elizabeth on the Mount of Olives), and pilgrims houses (e.g. Institute of the Very Holy Mary on Nablus Road, the pilgrim houses of the Greek Catholic and Maronite Patriarchates in the Old City). Cf. Consulate general of France in Jerusalem, “Les communautés religieuses”, <http://www.consulfrance-jerusalem.org/Les-communautés-religieuses>.

⁴³³ Jaulmes, *op. cit.*

fear is that, since the premises are not inhabited by religious communities unlike the other French domains, they could be colonized by Jewish settlers flying high the Israeli flag over yet another part of occupied East Jerusalem. This political dimension of the French religious mission in Jerusalem is also highlighted by the technical assistance the French Adviser for Religious Affairs provides in the management of the religious communities' properties in front of the lust they generate for either economic or political reasons from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. For example, the French diplomatic mission has been playing an important role to impede the sale to private entrepreneurs (most probably Israeli Jews or Christian Evangelical Americans) of the Abraham House - a pilgrim hostel, health care and biblical studies center situated in the Palestinian neighborhood of Ras Al-Amud overlooking the Old City. In such situations, the Religious Affairs Department of the French consulate general endeavors to raise the landowners' awareness of the political dimension of these real estate transactions with the objective of preventing additional Israeli settlement enclaves in the Palestinian section of the city. Likewise, the consulate has been following closely the ongoing negotiations between the Holy See and the Israeli authorities on a controversial economic agreement,⁴³⁴ trying to make sure that any deal does not imply the Vatican's tacit recognition of the Israeli sovereignty over sites located in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Consulate General of France in Jerusalem: the Last Remnant of the French "Arab Policy?"

As illustrated by the political role played by its religious mission in favor of the respect of international law in Jerusalem, the French consulate general seems to act as a vector of France's traditional position on the city. In fact, the status of this diplomatic post is determined by France's official stance on the sovereignty of Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories. As mentioned earlier, France refuses to accept the legitimacy of Israel's annexation of the city and, pending an agreement

⁴³⁴ On 10 June 2012, a report published by *Haaretz* revealed that a draft economic agreement under discussion between Israel and the Vatican to regulate the legal and financial status of the activities and properties of the Roman Catholic Church in Israel failed to make a clear distinction between Israel proper and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). The annexed list of Catholic properties under discussion (the so-called "Schedule One") included sites situated in the oPt and East Jerusalem, and the draft contained provisions that accepted the application of Israel's domestic legislation to Church institutions located in occupied territories. The leakage of the document elicited strong reactions of reprobation from Palestinian officials, who condemned the Vatican's indirect recognition of Israel's illegal "exercise of power and authorities in the occupied Palestinian territories." Farge, *The Vatican and Jerusalem*, *op. cit.*

between the parties, considers that the notion of *corpus separatum* incorporated in UNGA Resolution 181 of 1947, although never applied, remains the only pertinent reference in international law. This position determinates the functioning of the consulate general, and in particular its extraordinary and complex consular jurisdiction. Being competent for territories for which France has not yet officially recognized any sovereignty – the city of Jerusalem in its integrality, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip – the consulate general has a unique status in the French consular network, constituting a diplomatic entity *sui generis* directly subordinated to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris without depending on any embassy, neither that of Tel Aviv today (responsible exclusively for the diplomatic contacts with the State of Israel) nor that of Amman before June 1967. The consulate general of France in Jerusalem appears therefore in the French diplomatic world directory under the distinctive section “Jerusalem” (and not that of any country).

This specific legal status defines also the rules of protocol. For instance, each newly appointed consul general in Jerusalem does not have to present a letter of credence to the Israeli authorities and has no official contact with Israeli officials, apart from inevitable relations with some departments of the Foreign Ministry such as those of the Protocol or Consular Affairs. These rules imply that the consul general must abstain from attending ceremonies organized in Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities and can make exceptions only for those organized by the Israeli municipality under the condition that foreign ambassadors in Tel Aviv as well as Israeli officials be absent.⁴³⁵ Thus, on the occasion of the Israeli national day, the consular corps congratulates only the Israeli mayor of Jerusalem, and does so in front of Jaffa Gate, careful of not stepping inside the Old City which is located on the eastern side of the Green Line. In addition, the division of the premises of the consulate general, dating from the time of the Jordanian-Israeli partition of the city, with the consular and diplomatic personnel seating in the west and the cooperation services in the east, has been maintained after 1967. The objective of these meticulously defined arrangements is of course to avoid that any gesture, as innocent as it may look, be interpreted as recognition of the unlawful Israeli annexation of the city. These measures can be a cause of friction with Israel, such as on the occasion of the festivities of the French national day (Bastille Day) which lead each 14 July to a mini diplomatic incident as the Israeli authorities reproach France for the splitting of the ceremony in premises located in the eastern and western parts of Jerusalem, and especially the holding of the Palestinian one in the prestigious French domain of Saint Anne in the Old City.

⁴³⁵ Mochon, *op. cit.*



Consular mass on Bastille Day attended by former Consul Frédéric Desagneaux,
Saint Anne Church, Jerusalem, 14 July 2013

The Premises of the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1918, France's consulate general in Jerusalem became emancipated from the embassy in Constantinople. This, together with the necessity of balancing the growing influence of mandatory Britain at France's expense in the city, conferred upon the Jerusalem mission an enhanced diplomatic role. To match their new ambitions, the French authorities eventually heeded the solicitations of the previous consuls general who since their establishment in 1843 had been complaining about the narrowness, insalubrity, and precariousness of their accommodations. In 1910, thanks to the contribution of a generous donor, Count Michel de Pierredon, France acquired a 5,054 m² land on the domain of Nikophorie, a property of the Orthodox Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher located on a small hill west of the Old City and benefitting from an exceptional view on Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's ramparts.



French consulate general - consular and diplomatic section - in Jerusalem, located west of the Green Line

In 1929, after the interruption of World War I, financial resources were allocated at last to begin the building process. The selected architect was Mr. Marcel Favier, who had been working in Jerusalem since September 1926 on the reconstruction plans of the Byzantine basilica of the Eleona on the Mount of Olives. At a time of fierce architectural rivalry between Western nations in Jerusalem, with several sumptuous buildings being erected in the neighborhood (the Pontifical Institute in 1927, the Scottish Church in 1930, the King David Hotel in 1931, the YMCA designed by the architect of the Empire State Building and the residency of the British High Commissioner in 1933), Marcel Favier opted for a sober style, as requested by the consul general in office at the time, combining modern simplicity and classical grandeur to convey the image of France as “a modern nation respectful of traditions.”*



French consulate general – premises of the cooperation services, located east of the Green Line in Sheikh Jarrah

The street where the French consulate general in Jerusalem is located bears the name of Paul-Emile Botta, French consul general from 1848 to 1855, famous archeologist who discovered most of the Mesopotamian treasures of the Louvre Museum, botanist, linguist, and fervent Catholic who supported initiatives aimed at affirming the Catholic presence in Palestine.

* Consulate general of France in Jerusalem, “Architecture”, <http://www.consulfrance-jerusalem.org/Architecture>

In virtue of its peculiar nature, the consulate general is endowed with responsibilities which make it more similar to an embassy than a mere consulate. At the consular and administrative level, it is in charge of the French (and dual) citizens living in Jerusalem (east and west) and the Palestinian territories, for a total of around 22,000 persons. Instead of the clergymen and pilgrims of the past, today those include a clear majority of French-Israelis (approximately 95%), a significant number of which actually live in illegal Israeli colonies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁴³⁶ The remainder is made up of dual French-Palestinian citizens, French nationals married to Palestinians, and French NGO workers, tourists, and clerics. At the political and diplomatic level, the autonomy of the consulate general gives it/endows it with the unusual role of serving as the political representation of France with the PNA. As such, it dedicates itself to supporting the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and, to a greater extent, managing the French assistance policy towards the Palestinian population. Since the international conference of donors held in Paris in 2007, France has contributed to the development of the Palestinian territories the amount of 350 million Euros (2008-2013), which places it among the six top providers of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians.⁴³⁷ This aid focuses on development projects (e.g. the building of infrastructures in the water and sanitation sector), democratic governance, including the reform of PNA institutions and the strengthening of local authorities, direct budgetary assistance for the funding of public servants salaries, and cultural, scientific and linguistic cooperation.⁴³⁸ This governmental action is complemented by growing decentralized cooperation initiatives between French and Palestinian local authorities.

East Jerusalem – together with Area C, Gaza and refugee camps – has been identified as a key priority area of the French assistance policy. Indeed, the cumulative effects of the annexation, neglect, rights violations, and the completion of the separation barrier have led to an unprecedented deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinian East Jerusalemites, with poverty rates as high as 78%, limited employment opportunities, a severely depleted educational system, and a

⁴³⁶ The exact number of settlers of dual French-Israeli citizenship is hard to assess according to the French consulate general, especially in the Old City and its immediate vicinity such as Silwan. France does not have official relations with the so-called Civil Administration, i.e. the Israeli governing body in charge of the occupied Palestinian territories.

⁴³⁷ The six top donors of humanitarian assistance to the occupied Palestinian territories in 2011 were (in million USD): US (280.7), EU (206.4), UK (82.8), Sweden (76.4), Germany (57.5), and France (43). Chalabi Mona, "How does Palestine's economy work?", *The Guardian*, 14 October 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/oct/14/palestine-economy-how-does-it-work>.

⁴³⁸ Around 18,000 Palestinian school students and 1,200 university students take French classes. Consulate general of France in Jerusalem, "La Francophonie", <http://www.consulfrance-jerusalem.org/La-Francophonie>.

systematic lack of physical and economic infrastructure.⁴³⁹ There, France's aid consists mainly in building or rehabilitating community infrastructure including housing units, developing the health sector,⁴⁴⁰ and supporting organizations which provide educational and psychosocial services to the population with a focus on women, children and vulnerable groups. The French consulate general encourages also grass-root economic empowerment activities,⁴⁴¹ and endeavors to foster wider economic development in East Jerusalem through, for instance, the enhancement of Palestinian production capabilities via the so-called "French Grant" scheme, which allows the purchase of French industrial equipment and services, or via the boosting of investments through an enhanced system of bank guarantees.⁴⁴² France's assistance also includes scientific cooperation with the Palestinian Al-Quds University of Jerusalem⁴⁴³ and support to Palestinian cultural life and heritage in the city.⁴⁴⁴ Besides, support is provided in the framework of the French decentralized cooperation system, with the Regional Council of Ile-de-France (Paris regional district) becoming in September 2012 the first French local authority to sign a cooperation agreement aiming at improving the living conditions of the local Palestinian communities. Last, through its human rights program, the French consulate general funds projects more characteristically political inasmuch as they aim at addressing the consequences of the Israeli violations of Palestinians' rights in Jerusalem. Those include support to civil society organizations' initiatives focusing on assistance to victims of house demolitions perpetrated by the Jerusalem municipality, on devising strategies to protect people from expropriations and forced displacements, on developing zoning and urban

⁴³⁹ See Alyan, Nisreen/Sela, Ronit/Pomerantz, Michal, "Neglect and Suppression in East Jerusalem. The Policies behind Widespread Poverty and Unemployment", The Association for Civil Rights in Jerusalem (ACRI), May 2012, <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EastJlem-Poverty-ENG-web.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁰ E.g. funding the trainings of Palestinian surgeons; creating a spinal cord center in the Augusta Victoria Hospital; providing drugs and surgical equipment to Saint Joseph Hospital. Cf. Consulate general of France in Jerusalem, "Carte interactive de la coopération humanitaire, sociale, et décentralisée", <http://www.cgfcarte.dajani-eye.com/>.

⁴⁴¹ E.g. supporting projects to renovate school children canteens and rehabilitate kindergartens in East Jerusalem; funding extra-school tutoring for underprivileged children of the Old City; facilitating the access of women to social and educative services and income generating activities. Cf. "Carte interactive", *op. cit.*

⁴⁴² However, although East Jerusalem is eligible, no project has so far taken place in that area because of the quasi-inexistence of economic life there, except for hotel trade which involves few investment opportunities – illustrating that no Palestinian economic development in Jerusalem is possible without tackling the political root causes of the problem.

⁴⁴³ E.g. establishment of a network of Palestinian universities for the development of distance learning (the "Rufo" project); partnership between the Department of Biology of Al-Quds University and the hospital complex of Besançon University via the scientific cooperation program "Al-Maqdisi." Cf. "Carte interactive", *op. cit.*

⁴⁴⁴ E.g. project of valorization of the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem implemented by the Center for Jerusalem Studies aimed to develop cultural, artistic and pedagogical activities around the renovation of Hammam Al-Ayn (NB: the Israeli authorities ordered the interruption of the rehabilitation works); project to transform the old Yabous cinema in a cultural complex. Cf. "Carte interactive", *op. cit.*

plans likely to offer alternative housing solutions, and on providing legal assistance for the victims of house demolitions and other Israeli abuses – all this in an effort to ensure continued Palestinian presence in the city despite Israeli attempts otherwise. The French consulate general also funds research and advocacy programs aimed at monitoring, analyzing, inventorying and raising awareness about the Israeli illegal policies and practices in Jerusalem, covering topics such as usurpation of lands under the pretext of the Absentee Law, recognition of the residency status of Palestinian children born in the city, family reunification, obtainment and restitution of identity cards, etc.⁴⁴⁵

In addition to the political dimension of its cooperation policy, France asserts regularly its disapproval of Israeli illegal actions in Jerusalem through the voice of the consul general in the city, a way for the Elysée to reassert its position while not passing the hurdle of a statement of disapproval at the presidential level. For instance, when in May 2009 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu affirmed that Jerusalem would forever be Israel's undivided capital ("Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people, a city reunified so as never again to be divided"), the French consul general at the time, Frederic Desagneaux, condemned the declaration for "prejudic[ing] against the final status agreement," adding that "in France's eyes, Jerusalem should, within the framework of a negotiated peace deal, become the capital of two states," and that "actions such as the destruction of Palestinian homes or the transformation of Arab districts risk provoking an escalation of violence [and] are unacceptable and contrary to international law."⁴⁴⁶ Such public stances, not surprisingly, provoke the ire of the French-Israelis who form the consulate general's main constituency, prompting overt criticism of the consul general and his collaborators for being too "pro-Palestinian," in addition to calls for their removal to Ramallah (and concomitant transfer of the Tel Aviv embassy to Jerusalem), as well as regular tensions and awkward situations in the premises of the consular chancellery.

Another important contribution of the French consulate general in Jerusalem at the political level regards the annual "EU Heads of Missions Report on Jerusalem," which since 2005 has been rep-

⁴⁴⁵ E.g. Project "Increased accountability among key duty bearers and stakeholders that directly or indirectly maintain the status quo" by Diakonia aimed at highlighting humanitarian international law in a context of occupation and providing recommendations to the international community on how to hold Israel accountable (budget: 1,325,000 €); support to research, advocacy and legal aid activities of HaMoked in favor of the Palestinian populations of East Jerusalem (10,000€); study by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling on the impact of the Israeli violations of human rights on Palestinian women (52,355€). Cf. "Carte interactive", *op. cit.*

⁴⁴⁶ "France: Jerusalem should be capital of two states", *Haaretz*, 22 May 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/1087483.html>.

representing the highest-ranking European official testimony of Israeli unlawful measures in the city. According to a source familiar with the file (who preferred to remain anonymous) the role of the French diplomats in Jerusalem in the writing of this strongly-worded and very critical report has been particularly constructive, often ready to go much further than many of their European counterparts. Besides, unlike for other countries such as the UK, the French consulate general in Jerusalem never consults the French embassy in Tel Aviv (supportive of Israel) on the drafting of the text, which surely allows for less self-censorship. This is all the more important as the report is negotiated between the representatives of the different countries, with their various opinions on the subject, down to the last detail, and that it is essentially on its basis that the consulate general formulates the priorities and orientations sent to Paris to devise France's policy and action plan in the city.

“EU Heads of Mission Report on Jerusalem 2013” – Recommendations

A. PRESERVING THE VIABILITY OF JERUSALEM AS THE FUTURE CAPITAL OF TWO STATES

1. Further strengthen EU efforts to counter settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem that constitutes a particular threat to the two-state solution, including through an intensified engagement with Israel and with relevant international partners. In particular seek to:

- a. Monitor closely developments on the ground in a coordinated manner in view of delivering timely and appropriate EU responses on settlement matters;
- b. Highlight the risks that settlement construction, particularly in E-1, constitutes for preserving Jerusalem as the future capital of two states;
- c. Monitor and respond appropriately to forced transfer of the Bedouin communities in E-1;
- d. Increase monitoring of settler violence, and the responses of the Israeli authorities to such incidents and advocate firm action and increased efforts to bring perpetrators justice;
- e. Consider possible consequences for known violent settlers and those calling for such acts of violence as regards immigration regulations in EU member states.

2. Further encourage current efforts to fully and effectively implement existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. In particular:

- a. Continue to apply the EU-Israel Association Agreement, in particular so that products produced in settlements do not benefit from preferential treatment;
- b. Continue to apply the “Guidelines on the Eligibility of Israeli Entities and their activities in the Territories Occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards”;
- c. Take further steps to ensure that consumers in the EU are able to exercise their right to an

informed choice in respect of settlement products in conformity with existing EU rules of origin and labelling, including other possible future measures;

d. Raise awareness amongst EU citizens and businesses on the risks related to economic and financial activities in the settlements, including financial transactions, investments, purchases, procurements and services.

3. Regarding demolitions in East Jerusalem

- a. Ensure close EU monitoring on this issue;
- b. In statements and in contacts with the Israeli authorities, highlight the EU's serious concern about the ongoing house demolitions and call for a halt to all demolitions in contravention of IHL;
- c. Strengthen the right to housing, land and property through continued support for legal actions on public interest cases and legal assistance to people facing demolition orders.

B. MAINTENANCE OF A PALESTINIAN INSTITUTIONAL PRESENCE IN EAST JERUSALEM

4. Press for the reopening, as stipulated in the Road Map, of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem in high level meetings with Israeli representatives as well with international partners. In that regard:

- a. Support and further strengthen the viability of the East Jerusalem hospitals;
- b. Support the reopening of the Orient House.

5. Support the engagement of the Palestinian leadership in the political, economic, social and cultural development of East Jerusalem.

6. Encourage EU and its member states to regularly host meetings with Palestinian officials in East Jerusalem.

7. Support Palestinian artists and Palestinian cultural institutions in East Jerusalem. Maintain the offer for European cultural events to be hosted by such institutions.

C. ENDING EAST JERUSALEM'S SOCIOECONOMIC ISOLATION

8. In statements and with relevant contacts, stress the EU's concern at the increasing isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

9. Express concern about Israeli policies, which hinder Palestinian access to East-Jerusalem, including its holy sites, and which contribute to the forced transfer of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, and in that regard:

- a. Call on Israel to remove restrictions on the movement of goods and services between the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem;
 - b. Call on Israel to end discriminatory Israeli visa practises restricting freedom of movement of EU citizens, including access to Jerusalem and EU consular services located there;
 - c. Call on Israel to lift discriminatory restrictions on family reunification and end the practice of revoking residency rights.
10. In close co-ordination with relevant partners, further promote economic development in East Jerusalem as well as call for the re-opening of the Arab Chamber of Commerce.
11. In contacts with relevant interlocutors and in statements, reiterate the EU's serious concern at the lack of adequate public infrastructure and services in East Jerusalem. In that regard:-
- a. Call on Israel to support, in accordance with IHL, an improvement of basic social services (such as those provided by East Jerusalem hospitals, elderly and psychosocial care, secondary education, as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training) to Palestinians;
 - b. Call on Israel to assure the integrity of the Palestinian schooling system by maintaining the Palestinian curricula in East Jerusalem schools; improving significantly school infrastructure as well as addressing the shortage of classrooms and of trained teachers in such schools.
12. Continue to provide assistance to ensure that Palestinians are included in the development of urban outline plans in East Jerusalem to help meet Palestinian housing needs and continue to support efforts to improve housing conditions in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City.

D. STRENGTHENING THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE CITY

13. Support efforts to preserve the rich religious and cultural heritage of East Jerusalem, including its Palestinian identity, which is at risk of further degradation. In this regard:
- a. Call for mutual respect of cultural and historical ties of all Abrahamic religions to Jerusalem and its holy sites;
 - b. Stress the EU's concerns about access to East-Jerusalem including its holy sites for Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza;
 - c. Continue to monitor closely developments at the City of David complex and new plans for the Silwan neighbourhood;
 - d. Express serious concern about the increasingly tense situation at Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount;
 - e. Stress the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount and of preserving the status quo;
 - f. Support and encourage inter-faith dialogue in Jerusalem.

Source: "EU Heads of Mission Report on Jerusalem", 18 March 2014, op. cit.

That said, as far as the actual implementation of the final recommendations of the report is concerned, the assessment is somewhat more nuanced. Those recommendations, whose enforcement is judged by the authors as “increasingly urgent,” aim to “maintain the possibility of a two-state solution” and “preserve the Palestinian social fabric in East Jerusalem on a political, cultural and economic level.” On the one hand, France follows most of the recommendations related to the “maintenance of a Palestinian institutional presence in East Jerusalem.” For instance, it joins the European efforts to “press for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem,” in particular the Orient House and the Arab Chamber of Commerce. It also “supports Palestinian artists and cultural institutions in East Jerusalem” and “maintains the offer for [French] cultural events to be hosted by such institutions.” Likewise, the French state continues to hold its national events in East Jerusalem, as most visibly exemplified by the celebrations of Bastille Day in the Church of Saint Anne in the Old City. In addition, France’s representatives refrain from meeting Israeli officials in their East Jerusalem offices, and avoid Israeli security and protocol accompaniment of French important personalities during their visit to East Jerusalem including the Old City, as difficult as it can be. As regards the objective of “preserving the viability of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states,” and in particular the question of demolitions of houses and other Palestinian infrastructure in East Jerusalem, France monitors closely the issue by for example joining European visits to sites of demolitions,⁴⁴⁷ endeavoring to ensure some official presence in Israeli courts in cases of evictions of Palestinian families, calling for a halt to these practices through European joint statements, and supporting local civil society organizations providing legal assistance to victims of demolition orders. The French authorities are also involved in the question of the forced transfer of the Bedouin communities in E-1, providing the displaced populations with development aid to reinforce their livelihood and humanitarian assistance items such as tents and water tanks.

As regards the recommendation to “strengthen efforts to counter settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem that constitutes a particular threat to the two-state solution” and the viability of Jerusalem as a shared capital, the French initiatives remain by and large insufficient, as seen earlier. A small step further was recently taken in line with the EU Report’s instruction of “raising awareness amongst EU citizens and businesses on the risks related to economic and financial activities in the settlements, including financial transactions, investments, purchases, procurements and services.”

⁴⁴⁷ E.g. the Bedouin settlement of Jabal Baba, located in West Bank lands east of Jerusalem, which has been earmarked by the Israeli authorities for the building of the so-called E-1 settlement.

Indeed on 24 June 2014, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs published on its website, in the “Advice to Travelers” to Israel/Palestinian territories section, a warning on the risks related to economic and financial activities in the Israeli colonies. Asserting that “the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights are territories occupied by Israel since 1967” and that “settlements are illegal according to international law, [...] financial transactions, investments, purchases, supply of provisions and other economic activities in the settlements or benefiting the settlements entail legal and economic risks [...] and] are likely to bring about disputes related to the land, water, mineral resources and other natural resources [...] as well as reputational risks.” However, while the move was generally welcome, it was no more than the sheer and belated enforcement of a decision of the European Council dating December 2012. This delay of a year and a half had been justified by the necessity of not disturbing the latest – and unsuccessful – attempt by the Obama administration to find a solution to the Palestinian issue through negotiations.⁴⁴⁸ During the period of the bilateral talks, from August 2013 to April 2014, an unprecedented acceleration of settlement building was observed, with 13,851 new housing units approved by the Israeli authorities.⁴⁴⁹ The UK and Germany had taken a similar measure already in December 2013 and January 2014 respectively. The Netherlands, for their part, had gone further by officially discouraging their companies to invest in colonies, in addition to heeding (like the UK) the EU Report’s recommendation of “ensuring that consumers in the EU are able to exercise their right to an informed choice in respect of settlement products” via a differentiated labeling, which Paris still refuses to do. In addition, the “Advice to Travelers” was issued in a rather muffled way, relegated at the end of the web page just before a description of the local climate... Overall, France has followed the report’s recommendation to “inform (for instance, websites, etc.) the visiting [French] citizens on the political situation in East Jerusalem” in a quite unsatisfactory manner. On the consulate general’s website, for instance, no such explanation is provided. Quite the opposite in fact: in the section “Settling in Jerusalem”, there is detailed information about the entry process into Israel, but “as far as access to the Palestinian territories is concerned,” it is only stated that “no Palestinian visa is required [but] an Israeli one is necessary to cross the check-points,” without recalling that the reason why an Israeli visa must be obtained to travel to East Jerusalem or the West Bank is that they constitute territories under Israeli occupation.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ The move, made also by other European countries, came in the framework of a new Israeli crackdown on the West Bank following the 23 April 2014 Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement.

⁴⁴⁹ Peace Now, “9 Months of Talks, 9 Months of Settlement Development”, 29 April 2014, <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/9Months>.

⁴⁵⁰ Consulate General of France in Jerusalem, “Venir vivre à Jérusalem - Formalités d’entrée et d’installation”, <http://www.consulfrance-jerusalem.org/-Venir-vivre-a-Jerusalem> (last visited on 7 December 2014).

Another case is settlers' violence against Palestinians, where the French authorities have turned away from the recommendation to "consider possible consequences for known violent settlers and those calling for such acts of violence as regards immigration regulations in EU member states," alleging technical difficulties associated with their dual nationality. What is more, France does not seem to try and prevent the settlement of French-Israelis in illegal colonies in the city or to ask those already settled to leave their homes in the colonies – albeit a serious violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention – and continues instead to offer them consular services. As for the report's recommendations relative to "ending East Jerusalem's socioeconomic isolation" from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, the French action is not particularly visible, as illustrated by the scarcity of official statements yet requested by the report such as "calling on Israel to remove restrictions on the movement of goods and services between the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem," or "calling on Israel to lift discriminatory restrictions on family reunification and end the practice of revoking residency rights." Similarly, "concerns about access to East Jerusalem including its holy sites for Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip," which is a recommendation aimed at "strengthening the religious and cultural identity of the city," are hardly ever heard. If pressures are exerted on the Israeli authorities away from the public eye, they look inadequate, as the failure to "end discriminatory Israeli visa practices restricting freedom of movement of EU citizens" has shown.⁴⁵¹

Eventually, the official adoption of the EU's Jerusalem Report, which would be an important political gesture, remains off the agenda, leaving the document fundamentally valueless – and exemplifying the dichotomy between the French authorities in Paris and in Jerusalem with respect to the contested city. Indeed, if the consulate general epitomizes France's policy on the status of Jerusalem, with its peculiar consular and diplomatic jurisdiction, its combination of religious and political functions, and its support for the basic needs and political rights of the Palestinian community on the ground, its capacity to act as an instrument of continuity with France's past "Arab policy" remains effectively hindered by greater circumspection at the head of the state.

⁴⁵¹ Such as in the case of French citizens married with Palestinians who are granted only so-called "Judea and Samaria" visas forbidding them from entering Jerusalem.

Epilogue

The traumatic episode of the Crusaders' "holy wars," which marked the commencement of the French presence in Jerusalem, set the tone for the country's interventionism in the city, characterized by the instrumentalization of religion for political gains. Indeed, as Jerusalem returned at the heart of foreign powers' struggle for influence in the 19th and 20th Centuries, France fought tooth and nail to defend its prerogatives as the "eldest daughter of the Church" and thereby assert a strategic position in the city and the region. These endeavors were partly gratified, as the French still enjoy today some of the rights and responsibilities associated with their past role of protector of the Christian holy sites and religious communities. From this period remain other remarkable vestiges, including an important architectural and archaeological legacy, and a wealth of representations and descriptions by French visitors and artists which reflect the Orientalist vision of the time.

The strong desire to ensure the preservation of its influence in the city against the ascendance of other players, together with the concern of the Catholics for the holy places, motivated France's adoption of the concept of internationalization as its *leitmotiv* on the issue of the status of Jerusalem, ardently defended at the UN as the French were losing ground in favor of the British and as the city then became the epicenter of the struggle between Zionist and Arab combatants. Successively, Paris' constant refusal to recognize any fact on the ground constituted a major sticking point between France and the newly created State of Israel, even when the relations between the two countries were at their zenith. Progressively though, with the entrenchment of the illegal Israeli *faits accomplis*, the issue of Jerusalem started losing momentum and its place at the core of the French doctrine on Palestine, despite repeated official rejections of Israel's annexation of the city and calls for its sharing as the capital of both the Israeli and the Palestinian state. Although the past French involvement in the settlement of the status of Jerusalem had some whiffs of colonialism, it helped at least in keeping the issue at the center of international attention and efforts for a just resolution. Today, this activism and interest in the fate of the city seem to have faded away, reflecting a broader lack of political will on the issue of Israel-Palestine. Indeed, except for a quite limited period of political avant-gardism on the matter, for instance on the question of the international recognition of the PLO and the right to self-determination of the Palestinian



"The Garden of Gethsemane, General view" by Félix Bonfils (circa 1885) © Princeton University Library

people, Paris' claimed "balanced" position on the conflict has appeared more and more tilted towards Israel, in addition to hiding behind a common EU diplomacy even more subservient to

the US and Israel since the accession of Central and Eastern European countries. Not only do France and its European partners continue to boost their cooperation with Israel in the alleged belief that it might lead to a stronger voice in the peace process, they also keep on focusing on assuaging the humanitarian symptoms of the crisis rather than tackling its root causes, thus allowing Israel to maintain its occupation at no cost in violation of its obligations as an occupying power according to international law.

So far, France has failed to rise to the challenge of the Israeli attempts to curtail the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and undermine both the city's universal character and its vocation as a future capital of two states. There is no need for French political leaders to devise more plans and scenarios for the sharing of the city, no less than 13 different models exist today. Instead, real pressure must be exerted on the Israeli side to eventually relinquish its occupation and accept a solution for Jerusalem which respects the emotional attachment and the interests of all sides, be they religious, historical, geographic, economic, or political. Despite the usual apologies of powerlessness, the arsenal of "soft power" instruments in the possession of France and its EU fellow states, which could make the Israeli occupation a political and economic burden and send a wake-up call to the Israeli society, is impressive: from the end of military cooperation and a total embargo on arm sales, through the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, to the unequivocal support of Palestinians' diplomatic moves at the UN and the International Criminal Court. At a minimum, the French authorities should stop their repression of non-violent civil society activities, and instead draw from those initiatives its inspiration to wave to Israelis the threat of sanctions and growing international isolation. If those measures still prove insufficient to allow a rapid and just settlement of the conflict, then the option of imposing a solution based on international law under the auspices of the UN and concerned religious bodies should be taken into consideration.

Jerusalem is nowadays on the verge of explosion as Israel strengthens its grip with an ever more aggressive settlement building and Judaization policy, systematically neglecting the needs of the Palestinians, cracking down on those daring to defend and demand their rights, and multiplying provocations, particularly at the Haram Ash-Sharif. The escalation of tensions and violence recently witnessed is just another reminder that it is time for justice in the Holy City.

Jerusalem, December 2014

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