

Preface

The aim of this book is to trace the making of a new geographical-political entity in the Middle East at the beginning of the modern era. The time frame of this study runs from Napoleon's invasion of Eretz Israel / Palestine in 1799 to 1948–1949, the years in which the State of Israel was established.

During the period of Ottoman rule the territory that would in time be called Eretz Israel / Palestine was not a separate political unit. In the administrative scheme of the Ottoman Empire it was divided up between several vilayets and sancaks. Moreover, the Muslims residing in the country at the time did not consider themselves a unique identity, but rather as part of the larger Arab population of the empire.

The Arab and Muslim nations began referring to the country as Falastin only after the beginning of the Mandate period, when the British officially called it Palestine. On the other hand, Christians, who already showed increasingly growing interest in this holy land in the nineteenth century, adopted the outlook – which was not new – that there was something unique about the territory known as Terra Sancta, the Holy Land. In addition, it was also referred to as “Palestine,” a historical name stemming from the name of the Roman province of Palaestina. Though Palestine was commonly used in diverse European languages for many centuries, it, too, did not refer to a clearly defined geographical territory.

Among the Jews the most widespread name for the country at the beginning of the nineteenth century was “Eretz Hakodesh” (the Holy Land). Use of “Eretz Israel” increased only after the beginning of Zionist activity, and more so after the Balfour Declaration.

“Eretz Israel” as the official name of a separate geographical territory in the modern era first appeared in the early translations into Hebrew of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, while in the original document the country was referred to as “Palestine.” Its boundaries were not defined in the Declaration, nor its expanse or size. Furthermore, these were also not specified in the official document conferring the Mandate for Palestine on Britain, which included the verbatim text of the Balfour Declaration.

The territorial delimitation of Eretz Israel / Palestine began during the term of the first British High Commissioner for Palestine Herbert Samuel. It was also then, shortly after his arrival, that the Hebrew abbreviation for Eretz Israel comprised of the letters *alef* and *yod* in parentheses was formally introduced after the Hebrew transliteration of “Palestine” instead of the full name “Eretz Israel.”

*

The thought of writing this book first came to me when I continued to give an annual course in the Department of Geography of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, after my retirement. In that course I chose to deal with the historical geography of Eretz Israel from the start of the modern era in it, at the beginning of

the nineteenth century, until the establishment of the State of Israel in the mid-twentieth century.

The choice of this theme was rooted in my own academic career. While studying at the university, towards the end of 1952 I joined the staff of the History Branch of the Israel Defense Forces which had been charged with preparing a first comprehensive history of Israel's War of Independence. Later, when I began teaching Historical Geography in the Department of Geography, I focused on the nineteenth century and then moved on to the British Mandate period. It was only natural that I felt I was closing a full circle by summing up what I had learned about the beginning of the modern era in Eretz Israel.

In this course I divided the lectures into two sub-periods: the late Ottoman period and that of the British Mandate. It was comprised of six lectures for each period, twelve in all. Due to the limited time at my disposal, I focused only on subjects which I considered to be especially significant. I gave this course year after year over a decade between the academic years 2008/9 and 2017/18.

This book follows the plan of the course, but differs from it in content and scope, since limited classroom time did not allow going into the entire subject in the manner I have done in the book. My choice of the subject matter of each chapter, including its sub-sections, is the result of my lengthy research and understanding of the period under study.

In writing the book I set myself four major objectives:

- (A) To provide a general *overview* of the formation of a new entity in the Middle East that emerged during a period of 150 years (1799–1949), from Napoleon's invasion of the region to the establishment of the State of Israel. This overview is presented basically from a historical-geographical perspective
- (B) To reveal *the history that lies behind the entity* with which I shall deal. Historical Geography, as a discipline, today acknowledges – at least regarding the modern era – that what is most important in it is the influence of man and society on the geographical landscape. The evidence and the sources are historical, while the objective is geographical: to trace the changes undergone during a certain historical period. Any landscape underwent development in stages. What happened in one stage continued to influence developments in later ones. When we deal with a lengthy period of time, we must learn about the different stages throughout the entire period. Since the goal is to explain what happened to the landscape of the past, obviously we cannot rely only on what can be seen today. From the moment a geographer asks, in one way or another, why a landscape is as he sees it, he sets out on historical-geographical research.
- (C) To conduct *an integrative study*. The subject of my study in historical geography is Eretz Israel, where several factors were active, each by itself and all of them together, which caused the changes and transformations that the country underwent. It therefore stands to reason that it is the interaction – the mutual

interrelationships and influences – of all these factors that will present us with a full picture of the developments in this specific territorial unit. In Eretz Israel, these factors were the Jewish community and the Zionist movement, the local Arab population and society and those in neighboring countries, Ottoman and British rule, and more.

- (D) To present *the significant role of Jerusalem* in developments throughout Eretz Israel during the period under study. At the beginning of the modern era, cities in Eretz Israel were small and the entire country was underdeveloped. Only Jerusalem had a unique status as the city holy to the three monotheistic faiths. During the nineteenth century, Eretz Israel was the scene of many important changes, most of which transpired in Jerusalem. Moreover, things that occurred throughout the country were increasingly connected to this holy city. Thus, discussion of developments in Jerusalem can clarify and explain much of what happened in Eretz Israel during the period covered by this book. Let it be clear, however, that I have no intention to deal with all topics connected with this unique city, whether in the final stages of Ottoman rule or during the British Mandate period, about which much has been written and published. Jerusalem will be discussed in the context of the overall framework of my book: the process by which a geographic entity known as Eretz Israel came about.

The 150 years that are the frame of time for this study have been the subject of much research and descriptive literature that continues to be produced to this day: literally many hundreds of books and thousands of articles. But as my book is an attempt to sum up and explain a lengthy process it was necessary to deal only briefly with many subjects during the years specified above. Since I only briefly mention others about which I chose not to go into great detail, I have added many footnotes that refer the reader to the articles and books I consulted during my research. The notes often clarify matters only partly explained in the text or not at all, sometimes with references to other, fairly similar, topics not dealt with in the book.

A Hebrew version of this book was recently published. In content, analysis, and conclusions the books are identical, the difference between them lying primarily in the bibliography and the footnotes. A great number of Hebrew articles and books have appeared in English versions; there are also a few relevant books originally written in English that have been translated into Hebrew. While sources in Hebrew have obviously been given precedence in the Hebrew edition, in the present volume an effort has been made to refer to translations or original works in English, some of which parallel the Hebrew studies. Hebrew articles and books for which no substitute could be found are cited by an English translation of their title with the addition of (Hebrew). The “Select Bibliography” includes all items referred to at least twice throughout the book, and a selection of items which appear only once. All books and articles are provided with full bibliographical details at their first – sometimes only – citation in the footnotes. Another difference between the two

books is that some of the local geographical details important for the Hebrew reader well acquainted with Eretz Israel have been deleted in the English version.

At the end of each chapter the text is supplemented by pictures of leading personalities mentioned in the book. Most are reproduced from the Photo Archives of Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi in Jerusalem, or from publications of this institution.

When presenting the various subjects dealt with in my study, I chose not to deal with them in the framework of any broad social theory or to compare them to those in other countries. I preferred to focus on the unique case of Eretz Israel in this specific period of time. Those 150 years have been divided into sub-periods, each marked by its own distinctive characteristics, but also influenced by that which preceded it. It is the combination of them all that produced what I believe to be the true broad picture that it is my intention to present to the reader. I believe that this is perhaps a first and even bold endeavor in the field of research in which I am engaged to recount, in one study, what happened during a lengthy and decisive period in the history of Eretz Israel in the modern era. I can only hope that I have successfully done so.

Since many topics in the book are relevant to present-day issues, dealing with them also contributes to arouse interest in these issues and adds to our knowledge of them. However, the reader should be wary of falling into the trap of anachronisms and to extrapolate from the present on historical events of the past. Similarly, we must also be careful not to deduce from what happened in the past to the present, for things have changed greatly over the years. Despite all this, there is no doubt in my mind that the past can teach us much about the present and influence our thinking about the future.

Another point I want to raise is possible criticism that may be leveled by scholars of this historical period. In this study I have focused primarily on the Jewish side, and within it on those adhering to Zionism. My analyses of other subjects such as, for example, Jewish relations with the Palestinian Arabs, the Ottomans, or the British, concentrate mostly on their support of or opposition to Zionist aspirations and activity during the period under discussion. I consciously chose to do so, for my objective, as noted in the first lines of this preface, is to trace the emergence of that new geographical-political entity that became Eretz Israel, in parts of which the State of Israel was later established. Had the Zionist movement not arisen, it is doubtful whether the development to which I have devoted this study would have occurred at all. The motivating force behind that process is without doubt the Jewish Zionist element. That explains why Jews are the major protagonists in my book, and there is no academic justification in this case to ask whether Zionism was a triumph of justice, or not. The process I have detailed in this book was the most important historical-geographical development in and around Eretz Israel during the period I have chosen to study. This also explains why I used the name Eretz Israel in the book's title and on many occasions throughout the chapters.

I take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues, friends, and acquaintances whose important research served me during the writing of the book. I extend my apologies to many others who researched and published works relevant to the period under discussion and to the topics with which I dealt, but to whose studies I have not referred in the notes. It was simply impossible to include all information within the limitations imposed by a book intended to provide an overall view of a lengthy period of time.

In the preface to the Hebrew edition I thanked many friends and colleagues who read parts of the manuscript and assisted me with their important comments. At times, I also noted such assistance in the footnotes. I especially thank my friend Yohai Goell who agreed to join me in preparing the English edition by locating translations of the Hebrew sources cited in the Hebrew volume, or parallel studies in English, and style edited the text. I am very much indebted to Orly Bruck who is responsible for the translation into English.

My thanks go also to the library of Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, whose collections include much important material on the history of Eretz Israel, and to the Ben-Zvi Photo Archives, whose holdings are constantly expanding, and its devoted volunteer, Yehuda Ahi-Miriam, who prepared the inserts of illustrations and maps.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank the three important academic publishers who jointly agreed to publish this book – De Gruyter Oldenbourg, the Magnes Press of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi – and their directors and staffs. Finally, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the private individuals and public institutions who supported the publication of this volume.

To all, my heartfelt thanks.

Jerusalem, March 2020

Yehoshua Ben-Arieh

