

MICHAEL SCOTT-BAUMANN

PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS

A SHORT HISTORY OF CONFLICT

‘Necessary and accessible’

JON SNOW

Journalist and broadcaster

**NEWLY
UPDATED**



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ACCLAIM FOR

PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS: A SHORT HISTORY OF CONFLICT

“This book is both necessary and accessible. So many people are mystified by this never-ending Middle East conflict. Here at last is a concise and readable account of a fundamental international issue of our time, one that has implications far beyond the region where it is set.”

Jon Snow, journalist and broadcaster, UK

“Michael Scott-Baumann makes the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict easy to understand in this clear, straightforward and unemotional history.”

John McHugo, author of *A Concise History of the Arabs*

“Excellent ... the ideal introduction to the history of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. A masterpiece of clarity, concision and balance, and written in a lively and accessible style, it provides a lucid overview of all key aspects of this complex and extremely important story. Scott-Baumann writes with great sensitivity and insight, enabling his readers to understand the perspectives of different historical actors, and to grasp the essence of competing interpretations of key events ... This book should be thrust into the hands of all those in need of a brief, clear and approachable account of the historical background to this still unresolved and geopolitically critical conflict.”

**Adam Sutcliffe, professor of European history at
King's College and coeditor of *The Cambridge
History of Judaism Volume VII***

"It is a high-risk venture to attempt an impartial account of the process, enabled by the British, by which the Jews gained a state in Palestine and the indigenous Palestinian Arabs were denied one. Scott-Baumann has taken that risk and succeeded with as near as it comes to a textbook history that brings us up to date with the injustice and dispossession that inform Israel and Palestine."

**Tim Llewellyn, former BBC Middle East
correspondent**

"Scott-Baumann set himself the difficult challenge of writing a primer on the now over-a-century-long history of one of the most complex conflicts of modern times. Not only does he rise to the challenge, but he even manages to offer insights that go beyond conventional historical accounts."

**Gilbert Achcar, author of *The Arabs and the
Holocaust***

"A complete history exploring the conflict between Israel and Palestine in just a few hundred pages ... A useful reference."

School Library Journal

"The huge library on the conflict and the massive information it contains requires that authors write books that effectively transmit that knowledge to a wide public. Now comes Michael Scott-Baumann, who does just this

excellently. His thirty-five years' experience as a teacher and lecturer in history is felt on each page of his book ... A road map to students and an entrance gate to whomever wants to go beyond it."

Menachem Klein, professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University and author of *Lives in Common*

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Trees for LYfe

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Preface

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has existed for three-quarters of a century. In essence it is a dispute over land, the land of Palestine, and includes what is today the State of Israel together with the West Bank and Gaza. It is a relatively small area of land, not much larger than Belgium or the state of Maryland, and its population is no more than thirteen million. The conflict is a dispute between Jewish immigrants and their descendants who have followed the ideology of Zionism and the Palestinian Arabs among whom the Zionists settled. Both claim the right to live in, and control, some or all of Palestine.

This book provides an up-to-date, historical account both for the student and the general reader who follows news of the ongoing conflict yet struggles to understand how it originated and has developed over the last century. It comes in the wake of former president Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century," Israeli threats to annex Palestinian land on the West Bank, and the eruption of violence across Israel and Palestine in May 2021.

The book outlines the pre-1914 origins of the conflict before examining Britain's role in the interwar development of the embryonic Jewish state and the Jewish-Arab tension that accompanied it. Above all, it explains the unique circumstances in which the State of Israel was created and examines both Israeli and Palestinian narratives of those events. It shows how history has shaped

the present and continues to influence policy. In examining a century of rapid change, it identifies key turning points, but it also highlights the elements of continuity, the links between the past and the present.

While explaining the context of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, the book focuses on the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. Thus, the second half of the book explores the development of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, and resistance to it, which is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today, as well as the challenges of peacemaking.

Each chapter starts with the key questions to be answered and ends by illuminating the human impact of the conflict with the inclusion of personal testimony, from an Israeli or a Palestinian perspective, using sources such as diaries, interviews, memoirs, and newspaper reports.

Throughout, maps show how boundaries have changed over the course of the last century, and a timeline of significant dates is included on pages 3 to 5. Key terms are set in bold, elucidated in the text, and further explained in a glossary at the end of the book. Here, you will also find brief biographical sketches of the key players, whose names are also in bold type.

Chronology

1882	Start of First Aliyah of Jews migrating to Palestine
1896	Publication of Theodor Herzl's <i>The Jewish State</i>
1897	World Zionist Organization (WZO) founded
1901	Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded
1914	Start of the First World War
1915	McMahon-Hussein Correspondence
1916	Sykes-Picot Agreement
1917	Balfour Declaration
1921	Haj Amin al-Husseini appointed as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem
1922	Supreme Muslim Council (SMC) established
1923	League of Nations formally recognizes British and French Mandates
1929	Arab-Jewish riots in Jerusalem, Hebron, and elsewhere
1930	Mapai (later Israeli Labor Party) founded
	Passfield White Paper
1931	Irgun formed
1936-39	Arab Revolt
1937	Peel Commission recommends the partition of Palestine
1939	British Government issues White Paper
1939	Start of the Second World War
1942	Biltmore Program
1945	Arab League formed
1946	King David Hotel bombing in Jerusalem
1947	SS <i>Exodus</i> refugee ship prevented from landing in Palestine

	United Nations votes for the partition of Palestine
	Start of civil war in Palestine
1948	Declaration of the new State of Israel
1948-49	First Arab-Israeli War
1948	United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) established
	UN Resolution 194 recognising Palestinians' right to return
1950	Israel passes Law of Absentees' Property
	Israeli Law of Return allows any Jew to become a citizen of Israel
1955	Operation Black Arrow
1956	Suez Crisis
1959	Fatah formally established
1964	Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) founded
1967	Six-Day War
	UN Resolution 242
1968	Battle of Karameh
1969	Yasser Arafat becomes chairman of the PLO
1970	PLO expelled from Jordan
1972	Munich Olympics massacre
1973	Yom Kippur War
1974	Arafat speech to UN
	Gush Emunim founded
1977	Likud Government formed in Israel
1979	Egypt-Israel peace treaty
1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon
	Palestinians massacred in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps
1987	Start of the First Palestinian Intifada
1993, 1995	Oslo Accords
1995	Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin

2000	Camp David peace negotiations
	Start of the Second Intifada
2001	9/11 attacks on the United States
	Start of Hamas suicide bombings
2002	Israeli “Operation Defensive Shield” in occupied territories
2003	President George W. Bush releases the “Roadmap for Peace”
2004	Death of Yasser Arafat
2005	Israeli evacuation of Gaza
2006	Hamas victory in Palestinian elections
2008	War in Gaza
2009	Benjamin Netanyahu elected prime minister
2014	War in Gaza
2018	Israel passes the Nation-State Law
2020	President Donald J. Trump announces the “Deal of the Century”
2021	Upsurge in violence in East Jerusalem and Gaza
	Netanyahu replaced as prime minister
2022	Killing of Shireen Abu Aklah, Palestinian American journalist
	Netanyahu reelected as prime minister
2023	October 7: Hamas attack on Israel kills more than 1,300 people and takes more than 150 hostages
	October 8: Israel formally declares war on Hamas
	Israel’s retaliatory bombardment of Gaza kills more than 2,600 people in the following week

CHAPTER 1

The Origins of the Conflict

- **Why did European Jews migrate to Palestine?**
- **What was the impact of Zionism on the Arabs in Palestine?**

Palestine before the First World War

The land of Palestine, a strip of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, was conquered by Arab Muslims in the seventh century following the emergence of the religion of Islam in what today is Saudi Arabia. Over time, most of the population adopted Arabic as its language and Islam as its religion, although a substantial Christian community and a small Jewish one remained. Then, in the sixteenth century, Palestine was conquered by the **Ottomans** (a Turkish dynasty named after its founder, Osman). The Ottomans were Muslims but not Arab speaking. They went on to conquer most of the Arab lands of the Middle East and thus came into possession of the three most holy sites for Muslims: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.

In the Ottoman Middle East, there was no officially designated area called “Palestine,” as such. Instead, the area to the west of the Jordan River and south of Beirut made up the three administrative districts of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Acre. However, the region was generally referred to as Palestine (***Filastin*** in Arabic).

The population of late nineteenth-century Palestine was 85 percent Muslim and about 10 percent Christian. It was largely rural and most of the population were *fellahin*, or peasant farmers. Palestinian society and politics were dominated by a small number of urban families. These “notables,” as they were often referred to, were landowners, often with commercial interests. They acted as intermediaries between the Ottoman government and the local population. Some were elected as members of the Ottoman parliament in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Many held senior government posts and religious positions. They collected taxes for the Ottoman authorities.



A family of Arab fellahin, or peasant, farmers

In the late nineteenth century, Palestine came into increasing contact with European traders and its farmers began to grow more cotton, cereals, olives, and oranges for

export. The port city of Jaffa increased the value of its agricultural exports from roughly \$120,000 in 1850 to \$1,875,000 by 1914 and its population quadrupled in size between 1880 and 1914.¹ It was not only trade that brought Palestine into closer contact with the European world: increasing numbers of Christian pilgrims came by steamship to visit the biblical sites of the Holy Land. They contributed funds for church building and stimulated the development of a tourist industry.

Most Palestinian Arabs were loyal to the Ottoman state, participating in elections to the parliament in Istanbul and in local government, as well as sending their children to the growing number of state schools. However, a change of government in Istanbul in 1908 led to insistence on the use of Turkish, as opposed to Arabic, in schools, law courts, and government offices in Palestine. This aroused criticism in Palestine's Arabic press and contributed to the emergence of a nascent Arab nationalism. Yet it was the issue of Jewish immigration that increasingly exercised Arab opinion in Palestine and led to calls for preventive action by the Ottoman government.

Zionism and Jewish Communities in Palestine

The Jews had lived in what is today Israel and Palestine from about 1500 BCE. In 64 BCE the Romans conquered Jerusalem and Palestine became part of the Roman Empire. Then, in 135 CE, after a series of revolts against Roman imperial rule, the Jews were finally dispersed. A minority remained but the majority settled in Europe and other parts of the Arab world.

By the late nineteenth century, most Jews lived in the European parts of the Russian Empire. Many were forced

to live in specially designated areas in the Russian Pale of Settlement and were subject to severe restrictions, the result of a policy designed to exclude them from the life of Christians in the Russian Empire. After the assassination of the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881, for which the Jews were widely blamed, a series of pogroms, officially approved riots, and campaigns of persecution were launched. Jews increasingly became the targets of **anti-Semitism**, verbal and often physical abuse directed at them because they were Jews. This experience had the effect of strengthening the belief among many Jews that they shared an identity, history, and culture, regardless of whether they were religiously observant or not. But it also persuaded many to flee. Between 1882 and 1914, 2.5 million Jews left Russia, the vast majority to the US and Europe to the west of Russia. However, a small number, about fifty-five thousand, made their way to Palestine, their ancestral home.



Jews had dreamed of returning to **Eretz Israel**, the biblical “Land of Israel,” and had prayed for “Next Year in Jerusalem” for hundreds of years. Now, especially with the development of the steamship in the nineteenth century, it became a more practical proposition for some of them. Those who emigrated to Palestine were motivated by the desire to escape persecution and find a safe haven, but, for many, that wish was combined with a desire for a national homeland.

Palestine had been home to a small number of Jews for hundreds of years, half of them living in Jerusalem, largely in harmony with their Palestinian Arab neighbours. They were made up of both Sephardic and **Ashkenazi Jews**. The former, mostly considered to be the descendants of Jews from Spain and North Africa, were predominantly Arabic speaking and some held positions in the Ottoman government. The latter had often come from Europe in preceding decades and tended to speak Yiddish (the language of most Eastern European Jews, derived primarily from German and Hebrew). Most of these so-called Ottoman Jews living in Palestine, whether Sephardic or Ashkenazi, were highly religious and eager to preserve and develop their Jewish identity within the Ottoman Empire. In contrast with those who were fleeing Russia, very few sought a separate, national homeland, let alone an independent Jewish state.

The Jewish settlers who arrived in the First **Aliyah** (Hebrew for “ascent”) from 1882 onward were mostly farmers. Many found their new life very harsh and departed after a short time, usually to Western Europe or the US, while those who acquired land and survived often

only managed to do so with the help of cheap Arab labour. Although most of the settlers who arrived in the 1880s came from Russia, particularly from what is present-day Poland, their ideology and political organisation, and that of their supporters, was to be formulated not by a Russian Jew but one from Vienna.

Theodor Herzl, a lawyer and journalist, wrote a book titled *The Jewish State*, which was published in 1896. He called for the Jews to form a single nation-state like that of France or Germany. Echoing the sentiments of other European colonisers at the time, he claimed that the Jewish state could also be an “an outpost of civilization,” a defence against the perceived barbarism of “Asia.”²



Theodor Herzl

In 1897, Herzl organised a congress in Switzerland in which the **World Zionist Organization (WZO)** was formed. Though it was not the first time that the term had

been used, the delegates at the congress now defined **Zionism** as the belief in “the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine.”³ Herzl’s political priority was to secure the diplomatic support of a great power in Europe and financial backing from European and American Jewry, some of whose members had acquired considerable wealth. The **Jewish National Fund (JNF)** was set up in 1901 to buy land in Palestine. Today, most of the land of Israel is held in trust for the world’s Jews by the JNF. It cannot be sold to non-Jews.

The Jewish immigrants of the Second Aliyah from 1904 onward also came mostly from the Polish lands of the Russian Empire. However, they were much more ideologically driven, and keen to implement Herzl’s ideas. After centuries of persecution, they stressed the importance of using the biblical language of Hebrew as a sign of their rebirth in what they saw as their Jewish homeland. Many of them displayed the characteristics of the pioneer – tough and self-reliant – and were determined to show how different they were from the image of the weak, helpless Jews of the Russian Pale. They developed the concepts of the **Conquest of Land** and the **Conquest of Labor**.

The Conquest of Land emphasised the importance of colonizing, irrigating, and cultivating the land. The Conquest of Labor articulated the belief that the Jews’ rebirth as a nation was best achieved through becoming economically independent and reliant on Jewish-only labour.

Many Jews living in Jerusalem, especially those who had been resident for many generations, were far from enthusiastic. Similarly, only a minority of Jews in Europe supported the Zionist project: for example, the more

assimilated ones feared that their loyalty to the states in which they lived might be questioned and that the Zionist project would make Jews less welcome to stay in Europe.

Arabs and Jews in Palestine - Neighbours or Enemies?

Many Zionists, especially those living abroad, believed that Palestine was, in the words made famous by the writer Israel Zangwill, “a land without a people for a people without a land.”⁴ Or, at the very least, that it was a desolate, sparsely populated country.

Large areas were, indeed, thinly populated, particularly in the desert regions of the south. However, as many early Jewish settlers acknowledged, much of its land was cultivated and many of its Arab inhabitants were opposed to Jewish settlement. As early as 1899, Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi, a former mayor of Jerusalem, sent a message to Theodore Herzl in which he recognised the historic rights of Jews in Palestine but pleaded, “In the name of God, let Palestine be left alone.”⁵ Herzl replied that Jewish settlers intended no harm and that Jewish wealth would bring benefits.

In the early years of Jewish settlement, some Arabs did, undoubtedly, gain jobs and income working on Jewish farms and in Jewish businesses. But many Arab tenant farmers were evicted from the land they had worked for generations after their Arab landowners, often absentees living in cities like Jerusalem or Beirut, sold it to Jewish newcomers. The farmers’ cause was taken up by the Arabic press: the newspaper *Filastin* appealed to fellow Arabs not to sell land to Jewish immigrants. Increasing reference was made, both in the press and by notables, to the terms “Palestine” and “Palestinian.” A sense of Palestinian

identity was coming to be shared by an increasing number of Palestinian Arabs.

Some Jews employed Arabs to work on the farms, plantations, and in factories they owned and some of them lived in mixed, Jewish and Arab, neighbourhoods. They saw themselves not as foreign colonisers but as people “returning” to their homeland, hoping to live in harmony with their Arab neighbours. However, many of the more recent immigrants of the Second Aliyah were determined to live and work separately. They wished to replace Arab labourers with Jewish ones, even if they were less skillful and had to be paid higher wages. For them, “Hebrew labor” was more important than economic efficiency. Furthermore, the WZO was prepared to subsidise them with funds channeled through the JNF.

Fear of eviction and dispossession undoubtedly fueled the growth of anti-Zionist sentiment in Palestine. Urban notables and the Arabic press called on the Ottoman government to halt immigration and land purchases, and, occasionally, restrictions were imposed by the Ottoman authorities in Palestine. However, immigration and settlement activity intensified in the early twentieth century, and in 1907, the WZO founded the Palestine Office in Jaffa to coordinate land purchase and organise the building of Jewish settlements.

The institutional foundations of the ***Yishuv***, as the Jewish community in Palestine was known, were laid in the decades leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914. Yet the Jewish population, at about seventy-five thousand, still only made up about 7 percent of the population, and not all were Zionists.

Few Arabs came into direct contact with Jewish colonists. However, there was friction, sometimes violence,

in and around Jewish settlements. Disputes over land led to attacks on Jewish property, and fighting resulted in a small but increasing number of fatalities.

By 1914, two emerging national communities were beginning to collide in their desire for the same land. The Arabs sought to maintain their position as the owners, while the Zionists sought to buy as much land as possible and turn it into a Jewish homeland.

When the First World War ended, in 1918, the Ottoman Empire, and its rule over Palestine, had collapsed. Another major power was to have a far more decisive impact on both the Arab and the Jewish communities in Palestine.

Personal Testimony

A Late Nineteenth-Century Jewish Immigrant

Herbert Bentwich was an unusual Zionist. Most Zionist immigrants were poor Eastern Europeans fleeing from persecution in Tsarist Russia. Bentwich, however, was an affluent British Jew of the professional class.

His great-grandson, Ari Shavit, an Israeli citizen, has read his great-grandfather's memoirs. Shavit wonders why his ancestor "does not see the land as it is," and he strives to understand why his great-grandfather is oblivious of the Arab villages:

Riding in the elegant carriage from Jaffa to Mikveh Yisrael, he did not see the Palestinian village of Abu Kabir. Traveling from Mikveh Yisrael to Rishon LeZion, he did not see the Palestinian village of Yazur. On his way from Rishon LeZion to Ramleh he did not see the Palestinian village of Sarafand. And in

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