Article

Prelude to the Arab–Israel Conflict: European Penetration of Nineteenth-century Ottoman Palestine

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Abstract

This article examines modern European intervention in the Middle East and the subsequent changes that shaped a new environment in the region as a whole and in Ottoman Palestine in particular. What were these changes and how did they intertwine with the creation, by the end of the century, of a substantial Western cultural and political presence in the Palestinian provinces of the Ottoman Empire? How did this presence, in turn, help to move the idea of a Jewish return to Palestine from the realm of fantasy to reality? This article examines how, in the framework of 'productivization' and European penetration, ideas of settlement of land—proto-Zionism—developed not just among Christian Restorationists but also within the Jewish community.

Keywords

Ottoman Palestine, protectorates, *Hatt-i-Humayun*, restorationism, Jews in Palestine, productivization, Sephardi, Ashkenazi

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 is usually regarded as the beginning of modern European intervention in the Middle East, culminating in the division of the area among the imperial powers a little over a century later. Engaged in a titanic struggle with Great Britain, Napoleon's France was seeking to outflank British sea power and block the major route to India, the crown jewel of the British Empire. Napoleon also had visions of mobilizing the Muslim world to France's side, or at least opening up direct access to France's presumed Muslim ally in the Indian arena, Tipu Sultan.

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In the Battle of the Pyramids, 21 July 1798, Napoleon inflicted a decisive defeat on the Mamluk Turkish rulers who had dominated Egypt since the thirteenth century. This victory seemed to demonstrate a radical shift in the military balance, underlining European advances in military technology and organization against the formerly formidable Turkish forces. Napoleon was, however, dealt a punishing blow when a British fleet, under Admiral Horatio Nelson, destroyed the French fleet in Alexandria only a week after the French victory on land. Determined to recoup his losses, Napoleon proceeded to invade Palestine and Syria, then (like Egypt) provinces of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from Constantinople by a Turkish dynasty that had conquered the region in the early sixteenth century.

Napoleon's advance was held up by his failure to capture the fortified city of Acre, then the chief port of the Palestinian areas. Had his siege of Acre in 1799 been successful, Napoleon asserted later that 'I would have put on a turban, I would have made my soldiers wear big Turkish trousers…I would have made myself emperor of the East, and I would have returned to Paris by way of Constantinople' (Paul 1894–95, p. 251). But Napoleon did not confine his search for allies to the Muslim world; while encamped outside Acre he also issued an appeal to 'the Jewish nation' to come and reclaim Palestine:

> Israelites, unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny have deprived of their ancestral lands, but not of name and national existence!...Rightful heirs of Palestine!…Hasten! Now is the moment, which may not return for thousands of years, to claim the restoration of civic rights among the population of the universe which had been shamefully withheld from you for thousands of years, your political existence as a nation among nations…[1]

But it was not to be. Apart from Napoleon's military defeat, the Middle East of 1799 was not the Middle East of a century later. There was no rally of Muslim support against the Ottoman Sultan (also recognized as Caliph of Sunni Muslims). Nor was there a visible Jewish response to his call for restoration of the Jews to Palestine; in fact, the chief advisor of Jazzar Pasha, his Ottoman adversary in Acre, was a Jew, Haim Farhi. Napoleon was forced to withdraw from Palestine and, eventually, from Egypt. Ottoman rule returned to Palestine with the restoration of the status quo ante (in Egypt, where Ottoman sovereignty had been theoretical for some time, a new ruler, Muhammad Ali, came to power).

Within a few decades, however, this situation was radically altered. Vast changes on the ground and, above all, the penetration of European influence and pressures, shaped a new environment in which Napoleon's notions of rallying anti-Ottoman Muslims and restoring Jews to Palestine were no longer so unthinkable. What were these changes and how did they intertwine with the creation, by the end of the century, of a substantial Western cultural and political presence in the Palestinian provinces of the Ottoman Empire? How did this presence, in turn, help to move the idea of a Jewish return to Palestine from the realm of fantasy to reality?

Palestine in Transition

There was no administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire corresponding to Western conceptions of 'Palestine'. The three districts (*sanjak*s) that together roughly match the later British Mandate of Palestine were Jerusalem (south), Nablus or Balqa (central) and Acre (north), and before 1830 they were part of a province (*vilayet*) ruled from Damascus. From 1830 to 1864 the three districts became part of another province ruled variously from Sidon (in present-day Lebanon), Acre or Beirut. In 1864 they were reattached to Damascus. The population of the three districts together in 1800 has been estimated at about 275,000 (the same area today holds almost 12 million). Within this population, there were only an estimated 7,000 Jews (Della Pergola 2001; McCarthy 1990, p. 2).

Contemporary accounts paint a picture of poverty and stagnation. Abandoned villages were noted in many areas (the estimated population in Biblical times, as well as later periods, is estimated at several times the sparse figure for 1800). The economic base was subsistence agriculture, with no city above 10,000 in population. Houses in the villages were usually mud huts, in blocks with joining outer walls for protection. Open areas were controlled de facto by the often-marauding Beduin, necessitating special arrangements for travel other than on main routes and there was frequent warfare among both Beduin tribes and village clans. Much power was actually in the hands of local sheikhs and notables, the role of the Ottoman government being often reduced to collection of taxes and conscription of soldiers. There were few services; most notably, the absence of well-maintained roads was reflected in the absence of wheeled vehicles; both goods and passengers were carried on horses, donkeys, mules or camels.[2]

The foreign presence in Ottoman Palestine, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was minimal. In particular, no foreign diplomats had been officially allowed in Jerusalem since the Muslim conquest in the seventh century (except, of course, during the Crusades), and attempted exceptions to this had been met by popular and governmental hostility (Khalidi 1997, pp. 29–30). Pilgrims were permitted in small numbers, but foreign non-Muslims had no right of permanent residence in Jerusalem. No public display of Christian or Jewish symbols—church bells, ram horns—was allowed. Non-Muslim religious institutions that pre-dated Islam were allowed to remain, but generally no new non-Muslim institutions were permitted.

A seeming exception to this picture was the practice of Capitulations, based on treaties that the Ottoman Empire had signed with European states beginning in the sixteenth century. These treaties granted European governments, initially, jurisdiction over their own citizens within Ottoman borders. But these were not 'capitulations' in the modern sense of the word (the title actually derives from the *capitula*, or chapters, in the agreements). They were actually perfectly in accord with traditional Muslim practice, as expressed in the Turkish *millet* system, under which each religious community had considerable internal autonomy. The Capitulations became a tool for European penetration only when the states

involved started to claim jurisdiction over all co-religionists within the Ottoman Empire: France as protector of all Roman Catholics, Russia of all Orthodox Christians and so on (Friedman 1986).

The first challenge in the Palestinian districts came, however, not from the West but from Egypt under its new ruler Muhammad Ali. An Egyptian army under Ibrahim Pasha, Muhammad Ali's son, conquered Palestine and Syria in 1832 and for a time even threatened to march on Constantinople itself. The Egyptians were forced out in 1840 by an international coalition that, because of its own rivalries, chose to save the Ottoman Empire from collapse. But the entire episode opened up the Palestinian districts to new outside influences, as well as fanning a revolt against Egyptian rule in 1834 that represents perhaps the first incarnation of a Palestinian political identity (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993, pp. 6–11). In lieu of agreement over the spoils, the default position (backed strongly by Great Britain in particular) was to prop up the faltering empire ('The Sick Man of Europe'). This pattern was to prevail until the end of the century. But the increased dependence on the balance in Europe meant that the Ottoman regime was much less able to resist European inroads into the Turkish heartland. And nowhere in the heartland was of greater interest to European governments than 'the Holy Land' (Carmel 1986, p. 304).

On three occasions—1830, 1840 and 1872—the Turks considered plans to amalgamate the three Palestinian districts into a new province of Palestine. On all three occasions they backed down, fearing that concentration of the holy sites into one unit would invite concentrated Western interest and intervention (Scholch 1993, pp. 10, 13–14, 16, 289). But they did recognize the particular sensitivity of Jerusalem in 1874 by making it an independent *sanjak* (or *mutasurriflik*) reporting directly to Constantinople. In 1888, the remaining two Palestinian districts, Nablus and Acre, were attached to a new province (*vilayet*) of Beirut, thus keeping Palestine divided.

Recent scholarship has disproved the picture of stagnation and decline of Palestinian areas during the nineteenth century. Between the time of the Ottoman return to control in 1840 and the beginning of Zionist settlement in the 1880s great changes took place. By 1882 the estimated population had grown to 462, 465, almost double that of 1800 (McCarthy 1990, p. 10). The 1839–76 period is also known in Ottoman history as the period of *Tanzimat*, or reorganization, when the Ottoman government made a serious effort to deal with the threat of the West by copying its institutions wholesale. Administration was centralized, educational and legal systems were revamped and secularized and the principle of equality before the law was proclaimed. In theory at least, the *millet* system was abolished and all groups within the Empire were to be treated equally (and were to be 'Ottomanized').

One of the key documents of these reforms was the *Hatt-i-Humayun* (Imperial Rescript) of 1856, which eliminated all discrimination on the basis of religion, language or race—a huge step for a regime headed by the Caliph. Religious freedom was thereby guaranteed (though not the right of Muslims to convert).

Foreigners could possess land, pending arrangements with relevant states (Blumberg 1985, pp. 92–94). While it represented an important step forward in human rights, the *Hatt-i-Humayun* also inevitably provided considerable leverage for further foreign penetration. The timing of this document also reflects dependence on support of European states. It came as the Crimean War (1853–56), in which the Turks had once again been rescued from a serious threat (this time from Russia), was winding down and their saviors—primarily Britain and France—were pressing for further opening of Ottoman territory, especially 'the Holy Land'.

By the 1870s, Ottoman authority reached into local levels as it had never before. Agriculture was becoming commercialized, trade with Europe increased greatly, a merchant and banking class emerged, and a state school system was beginning to take hold. Moreover, all sources speak of an improvement in basic security, as travel outside the larger cities became safer and more routine (Dinur 1954, p. 64; Divine 1994, pp. 107–35; Kramer 2008, p. 80; Scholch 1993, pp. 253, 285).

A key part of the reforms was a new Land Law in 1858, under which the government tried to systematize and rationalize a chaotic system of land tenure. Most of the tillable land had been farmed as communal land (*musha*); the result of the new registration was that some of it became private land (*mulk*), often registered in the name of urban notables because the farmers (*fellahin*) feared that registration was a prelude to additional taxation, or that it exposed them to conscription. Consequently, some of this was sold, sometimes to foreigners, and the *fellahin* who felt they had tenure over the land were displaced. This is part of the background to later conflicts with Zionist settlers. The new law also contributed to the rise of an urban notable class, often drawn from the same families that had dominated local society, but now drawing its wealth and power from landowning and from positions of power in the expanded Ottoman administration (Khalidi 1997, pp. 38–54, 94–96, Khalidi 2000, pp. 221–22; Kramer 2008, pp. 81–83).

As the century progressed, growing Ottoman apprehension of European penetration led to a redoubling of efforts to establish control and promote self-development. In the two and one half decades after the Crimean War, the economy grew significantly, especially in exports (Scholch 1993, pp. 134, 166–68). A key part of the new growth was the improvement in transportation, especially the building of roads for wheeled vehicles. The first road between the port of Jaffa and Jerusalem opened in 1868, and soon a regular wagon traffic developed (a rail line was completed in 1892) (Kark 1990, pp. 57–76). The development of exports, ironically, served to create closer economic ties to Europe, the main customer for the agricultural products being exported. These products included wheat, barley, olive oil and soap, and fruits including oranges, which became a significant export commodity after the Crimean War.

The cities of Ottoman Palestine—Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus, Hebron and especially Jerusalem—grew rapidly during this period. Jerusalem expanded beyond the Old City walls by middle of nineteenth century, and from a town of fewer than 9,000

in 1806 had reached 30,000 inhabitants by 1880 (a majority of them Jewish) (Ben-Arieh 1975). With this came the multiplication of foreign-affiliated churches, monasteries, hospices and hotels for pilgrims, schools, hospitals and other institutions. The government felt a special threat from the proliferation of schools operated by foreign missionaries, who by the end of this period had become a significant cultural presence. The towns and villages were also growing during this period; there are observations on the reoccupation of formerly abandoned sites, given the improvement in the security situation in the countryside. Even some of the Beduin clans were becoming settled (Grossman 1994).

Though forced to open its doors to Europeans, the Ottoman regime was also sensitive to the long-term impact, and intent on safeguarding the Muslim (and non-European) character of its Palestinian domains. The question was: would these limited efforts, or more importantly the overall pace of modernization and development that the Ottoman regime was promoting, be sufficient to block the accelerating pace of European penetration?

European Politics and the Ottoman Empire

From the time of its defeat at the gates of Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman Empire had suffered one defeat after another. It fought 13 wars with Russia between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, losing the Crimea and other Black Sea domains and bringing the Russians to the brink of achieving their long-sought goal of controlling the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, the straits controlling access to the Black Sea.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans also suffered the loss of Greece, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, retaining only a fraction of their European holdings (and most of this was also lost before World War I). They had also experienced the near-loss of Syria and Palestine to Muhammad Ali of Egypt in the 1830s. The French established a de facto protectorate in Lebanon in 1860–61, while the French and British penetrated Egypt, still technically part of Ottoman domains, in the course of the building of the Suez Canal, with the British finally occupying Egypt in 1881–82. In North Africa, the French began the conquest of Algeria in 1830 and established a protectorate over Tunisia in 1881. All in all, in the course of two centuries the Ottoman Empire lost over half its territories to a combination of European imperialism and restive non-Muslim (mostly Christian) Western-oriented minorities.

In European diplomacy the decline of Ottoman power was marked by reference to ‘the Sick Man of Europe’, and the question of division of spoils from the sick man’s collapse was labeled ‘the Eastern Question’. The Turks for their part exploited rivalries among the European powers in order to block further inroads into the Ottoman heartland. In the Crimean War, for example, the Russian threat was countered by British and French support; immediately after the war, however, the Ottoman Sultan gave the Russians a prime concession in Jerusalem

(the 'Russian Compound') as a counterweight to growing dependence on Britain and France (Carmel 1981). Later in the century the new European power, Germany, became the counterweight to British and French pressures. The Turkish practice of this diplomatic art was recorded at mid-century by the British Consul in Jerusalem, James Finn:

> But the sweetest morsel of Osmanli [that is, Ottoman] performance was what went to weakening that which they disliked the most—European influence in the East. This they tried to do in Jerusalem by setting the Consuls against each other…These arts are the resource of feebleness, however skillfully practiced; and that they are often practiced with consummate skill no one who has watched Turkish diplomacy on a large or a small scale can deny (Finn 1878, vol. 1, pp. 408–09).

But given the degree of dependence on European powers—especially Britain and France, during most of this period—Ottoman authorities had to give ground on the exclusion of Franks (Europeans) from places of religious interest and sensitivity. In 1841, Britain and Prussia (soon to be Germany) were allowed to establish a joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric in Jerusalem, and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate moved from Constantinople to Jerusalem. In the same year, and as part of the same trend, the office of Chief Rabbi (*Hacham Bashi*) was established for the Sephardi (Middle Eastern) Jewish community. In 1848, the office of Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, which had been moribund since the Crusades, was revived and the French assumed the role of protector of the Roman Catholic Church in the region (Bosworth 1986; Finn 1878, vol. 1, pp. 44–45). Over the years, permits for the building of new churches were granted to British, French, Prussian and other representatives of Christian nations.

A telling mark of the changing power realities was the end of exclusion of non-Muslims from the *Haram ash-Sharif*, or Noble Sanctuary, known to Jews and Christians as the Temple Mount. This enclosure, in the southeastern corner of the Jerusalem Old City walls, was holy to the three religions; as the site of the 'al-Aqsa' Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, it is considered the third most holy site in Islam after Mecca and Medina. Entrance to the compound had been strictly forbidden to non-Muslims since it had been wrested back from the Crusaders in the twelfth century, and this was enforced by a fierce troop of guards recruited from the Darfur region of Sudan. But during the Crimean War, with Ottoman Turkey dependent on Western rescue from the Russians, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the exclusion. In 1855, one of the first royal visitors since the Crusades, the Belgian Duke of Brabant (later King of Belgium), arrived with a *firman* (imperial decree) from the Sultan granting access to the *Haram*. From this point on, admission to the holy site became a common occurrence (J. Finn, vol. 2, pp. 220–57).

The prohibition of foreign (Christian) diplomats in Jerusalem also fell during this period. Great Britain was allowed to establish a Consulate in Jerusalem in 1838, when it was still occupied by Ibrahim Pasha's Egyptian forces. This was

followed by Prussia in 1842, Sardinia and France in 1843, Austria in 1847, Spain in 1854, the United States in 1856 and Russia in 1857. The growth of European diplomatic powers inside Ottoman territory was most significant in the framework of the Capitulation treaties. As noted, the initial purpose of these agreements was to allow foreign governments to exercise jurisdiction over their own citizens who were temporarily visiting or living in the Ottoman Empire. This was considered a natural state of affairs in the case of non-Muslims to whom Muslim law was in any event irrelevant, and it also served the purpose initially of attracting foreign merchants and companies to do business in the empire. But in the nineteenth century it became a critical tool of intervention in the hands of the foreign consuls, who engaged in lively competition to extend the number of their nation's *protégés* as much as possible. Part of the background to the Crimean War was the Russian demand for recognition of its right to act as protector of all Orthodox Christians—not just Russians—in the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman authorities, not surprisingly, deeply resented this misuse of the Capitulatory system, which not only infringed upon their sovereignty but also encouraged separatist and nationalist tendencies. They tried to abrogate it when the *Hatt-i-Humayun*, guaranteeing equal rights to all, was issued in 1856. This, they argued, removed the need for protection of particular communities. But they were rebuffed in this by the European powers, who insisted in the Treaty of Paris that same year, and later in the London Conference of 1871 and in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, on the continued unchanging observance of all existing treaties and conventions (Friedman 1986, pp. 281–84; Oke 1982). The bottom line was that European consuls were able to intervene extensively in defense of the right of foreigners—or non-Muslims generally—to buy land and get building permits in the Ottoman Empire.

Cultural Penetration

The 'hard power' of European intervention in Ottoman Palestine was accompanied by a full range of 'soft power' penetration through religious, educational, scientific and charitable institutions. In some cases, these activities carried a millennial or messianic overtone that envisioned a redemptive future for the Holy Land. One scholar of the period has labeled this phenomenon 'the Peaceful Crusade' (Scholch 1993, pp. 65–70). By the end of the century these institutions provided an alternative infrastructure that invited further foreign inroads.

Greater contact with Europeans brought about a shift in attitudes within the region. Hostility toward the Christian West was a historical constant and was hardly lessened by a greater European presence in the Muslim heartland. But for some time Europeans had not been seen as a threat nor as having anything worth copying; despite some material advances, they were regarded—as they had been at the time of the Crusades—as inferior in cultural and civilizational terms. But

now the local population had to come to terms with a post-Renaissance European challenge of an entirely different order. Some Western institutions seemed to be worth copying; this was inherent in the entire Ottoman *Tanzimat* program of reform and modernization. Within the Palestinian areas as elsewhere, European models of education also were adopted, sending the children of the elite to local missionary or private Western-model schools, or to European schools and universities (Khalidi 1997, pp. 41–42).

The simple physical presence of so many Europeans was an element in this change. Organized pilgrimages to 'the Holy Land' began in the 1860s, and by the 1870s thousands of Christian pilgrims each year were passing through the major religious sites. It was said that in Jerusalem they seemed at times to outnumber the inhabitants. Travel guides for European and American pilgrims began to appear; the first Baedecker guide to the Holy Land was published in 1875. The advice given to travelers reflected the somewhat patronizing perceptions of Westerners in their relations with the population that they encountered. The pilgrims were warned that only in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and Hebron—the main sites of Christian interest—could they expect European-style hotels of a reasonable standard. They were urged to avail themselves of a *dragoman*—literally, a translator, but in practice a contractor who would make all the necessary local arrangements. Security was not generally an issue on the main routes, but elsewhere foreigners were advised to carry weapons and/or have an armed escort. The ubiquity of requests for *baksheesh* (gifts) occasioned considerable comment (Bosworth 1986, pp. 38–39).

The various Christian denominations competed in establishing schools that provided a Western-style education as well as promoting their particular religious persuasion. The language of instruction was usually the European language of the sponsors—English, French, German, Russian—and this was a major vehicle for disseminating knowledge of these languages and, by extension, access to European literatures and cultures. According to a French report, by 1895 there were 101 foreign schools in the Jerusalem district alone.[3] This was taking place while Ottoman reformers were trying to establish the first network of secular state schools, but by the end of the period the Ottoman schools had grown to only 17,000 students (in a population of roughly one-half million) (Landau 1975).

The French were particularly vigorous in pursuing their claimed 'protectorate' over all Catholics on Ottoman territory, bringing them into conflict with other states (Italy, Spain, Austria) seeking to protect their own Catholics. The Russians were also very active in expanding their base in the Russian Compound in Jerusalem and in promoting Orthodoxy throughout the area with land purchases and building (Scholch 1993, pp. 55, 59). The Orthodox were in fact the largest single group among Ottoman Christians, and at the end of the period Russian pilgrims were the single largest group among Christian pilgrims (when Russian Jews began to arrive in numbers, the route from Odessa had already been well established).

Protestants, on the other hand, had a very small presence among local Christians; because of this as well as their own inclinations, they were more attuned to proselytization. But proselytizing among Muslims was strictly forbidden, and in any event converting them to Christianity was a lost cause (as Herman Melville noted during an 1857 visit, 'might as well attempt to convert bricks into bride-cakes as the Orientals into Christians') (Horsford and North 1989, p. 81). That left the other Christian denominations, and the Jews, as the focus for their attentions. And the conversion of the Jews, as will be seen below, was tied in to their prophesied resettlement in Palestine.

The idea of Christian or Jewish settlement in Palestine followed from both generalized colonial instincts and from religious impulses. Typical was a German religious publication that declared in 1872 that the *fellahin* would willingly sell their land to Europeans and would then serve as agricultural workers on the land.[4] The attitude toward the indigenous population was reflected in the same year by a representative of the Palestine Exploration Fund (an English organization), who wrote that

> I can only say that it would be a most splendid thing if the [Ottoman] government would overcome its aversion to selling land to foreigners. With the right guarantees, a great portion of this land would find a favorable market, and then the peasants now there would either be cleared away or transformed into useful members of society, while the increased income of the Turkish government would be considerable.[5]

It was only a short step from the idea of European settlement in Palestine to the millenarian vision of the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland there as a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy—in this case, Christian prophecy. This particular strand of apocalyptical thought, known as Restorationism, was common throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in Great Britain and the United States. Some of the pilgrims who arrived in the Holy Land with these ideas actually tried to put them into effect. An example was the American Clorinda Minor of the Millerite movement (a precursor to Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists). Minor arrived in Ottoman Palestine in 1851 with the intent of furthering the establishment of a colony of Christian converts from Judaism (the conversion of Jews being, in this view, a necessary precondition for the second coming of Christ). She was particularly taken with the efforts of one John Meshullam, a converted Jew who was trying to build such a colony near Bethlehem (Yothers 2007, pp. 44–48).

Another Restorationist was Warder Cresson of Philadelphia, who left his family in 1844 and traveled to Jerusalem. Cresson reversed the standing doctrine by converting to Judaism and calling on all Christians to do likewise. Adopting the name Michoel Boaz Yisroel ben Avraham, he tried to establish Jewish agricultural colonies in Palestine, and was eventually buried in the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives. He is memorialized in Herman Melville's epic poem *Clarel* as the Jewish convert 'Nathan', who against all odds tries to bring Jews back to the soil (*ibid*., pp. 51–53, 109–38).

But the most serious effort of Protestant Restorationism was the work of the Temple Society, a German sect with roots in Pietist Lutheranism. Founded in 1861, the movement aimed to advance the second coming of Christ by settling in Palestine and, in the course of time, reclaiming the land for 'God's people'. The Templers established colonies near Haifa in 1868, near Jaffa in 1871, and near Jerusalem in 1873. A second wave of settlement in the first decade of the twentieth century added four additional settlements; at its height the Templer community numbered about 2,200. Though the Ottoman regime was basically opposed to any European settlement in its territory, it became increasingly dependent on Germany during the closing decades of the century as Britain and France drew closer to its traditional foe, Russia. And the Germans, like the other powers under the Capitulations, were assiduous in protecting their own citizens on Ottoman soil—even the members of an apocalyptic sect.[6]

The significance of the Templers was the clear demonstration that European settlement in Palestine was conceivable and viable. The Templers, after initial difficulties, established flourishing colonies that were considered as a model of what could be achieved despite the opposition of Ottoman authorities and the open hostility of the host population. European farming methods were successfully introduced, and while having limited influence on the traditional agriculture of the *fellahin*, served as a model for others who were to follow (Talmon 1995, pp. 72–73, 81).

The Templers did not include a restoration of the Jews in their own millenarian vision, but common background, common interests and similar situations later led to some degree of cooperation with the early Zionist settlers from Europe. For example, the two groups worked together to persuade the Turkish government to rescind an arbitrary tax on wine (*ibid*., p. 74). More specifically, the Templers developed a blend of farming, with a focus on orchards rather than field crops that influenced the early Zionist agriculturists (Penslar 1991, p. 20; Talmon 1995, pp. 74–75). On a more general level, the Templers became a model for what could be accomplished; Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, father of modern spoken Hebrew and leading ideologue of the first wave of Zionism, wrote in 1881: 'Did or did not [the Templers] who settled near Jaffa find blessing in their labors? Did they not turn the land that was desolate desert into a Garden of Eden?'[7] A Palestinian scholar has described the Templers as 'proto-Zionists' who served as a model to later Zionist settlers in a number of ways, including poor relations with the local population and the importance of consular protection (Yazbak 1999; see also Muslih 1988, p. 41).

Hostility to Europeans

One measure of the European presence in Ottoman Palestine was the reaction it provoked among Turkish rulers and Arab inhabitants. The more visible this presence became, the more it evoked opposition and hostility from those affected.

To be sure, the Muslim world had traditionally exhibited a strong antipathy toward the Western Christian world. When Napoleon's forces approached Palestine in 1799, the governor of Gaza had referred to them as 'the damned French infidels, may God destroy them all'.[8] The two worlds had been in collision since the seventh century, clashing over control of areas from the Iberian Peninsula to the Balkans to Constantinople itself. The Crusades still registered strongly in the collective Muslim historical memory.

Non-Muslims under Muslim rule, while permitted to practice their own religions, had always been subject to various disabilities that denoted their less-than-equal status. But there was an added animus in the case of Western Christians: Europeans, or in common speech 'Franks'. As the European presence grew, there was a growing tendency to focus on the civilizational rather than religious divide; in the words of British Consul James Finn, 'the intolerance of the old school was directed in our era rather against Europeanism than against the Christian religion' (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, p. 210). On the popular level this was reinforced by a general dislike of all foreigners (put simply, xenophobia), a phenomenon hardly restricted to nineteenth-century Palestine.

The popular dislike of Western foreigners in their midst was noted by the many pilgrims and travelers during the period. Mark Twain, recounting his 1867 visit, mentions avoiding a village where 'we would be attacked by the whole tribe, for they did not love Christians', and likewise being refused water elsewhere because of 'the idea of Christian lips polluting a spring whose waters must descend into their sanctified gullets'.[9] Isabel Burton, wife of the noted explorer Richard Burton, tells of having to carry slippers to put on in places where Muslims bare their feet, because 'a dog of a Christian' should not tread on sacred ground.[10] Major C.R. Conder, who carried out an important survey of Palestine in 1872–74, wrote later:

> Let the student of Islam run the gauntlet of the fanatical guards of these sanctuaries, let him be stoned for a dog and denied a drink of water as a Kafir [unbeliever], and then acknowledge that the stern prejudices of the Middle Ages are not extinct. (Conder 1891, pp. 231–32)

In this setting, each new European intrusion triggered negative and sometimes explosive reactions. When European consulates were finally opened in Jerusalem beginning in 1838, foreign diplomats moved about only with armed escorts. The ringing of church bells, forbidden in the past, occasioned protests and riots. Initially, the new consuls were not allowed to raise their national flags over their missions in the Holy City; when the French did so in 1843, an angry mob quickly tore it down. Only the Crimean War, underlining increased Ottoman dependence on British and French support, changed the complexion of things. At war's end, in a spirit of celebration, the British Consulate hoisted a Union Jack from its chimney, and other consulates soon followed suit (J. Finn, vol. 2, 31, pp. 362–63).

However, in the first phase of the Crimean War, when the Ottomans faced Russia alone, the Christian population of Palestine was seized by tremendous fear of massacre at the hands of furious Muslims. Finn recounts that native Christians asked in panic 'whether *all* Christians were to be killed on account of Russia being at war with Turkey, or whether only the Greeks…would be murdered…' (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, p. 301). In 1856, the accidental shooting of a beggar by a missionary in Nablus led to ugly mob scenes and to the sacking of Christian homes and churches as well as foreign missions (J. Finn, vol. 2, pp. 427–28). That same year the proclamation of the *Hatt-i-Humayun*, establishing legal equality for all religious and ethnic groups, was met by staunch opposition within the Palestinian areas from conservatives who objected in principle to the equality of non-Muslims. Consequently, it could only be implemented gradually; as Finn concluded, the liberal provisions of the new charter 'ran so strongly counter to the recorded principles of old that are held so sacred, and to the inveterate habits of many generations …that it really did require patience, together with firmness, for putting the new charters and edicts into execution'.[11]

The May 1876 murder of British and French consuls in the city of Salonika (in the Ottoman Balkans) caused another panic among native Christians in Palestinian cities, and especially in Jerusalem. Christians boarded up their homes and shops and fled to monasteries; only a public announcement by Muslim notables denying any planned attacks calmed the situation.

Apart from these ongoing frictions, there was a special hostility shown to foreign land buyers, even when the transactions were perfectly legal. In many cases, the sale of what the *fellahin* had considered to be communal land was an element in the conflict. This was the case in the 1870 purchase of land for a Jewish agricultural school, Mikveh Yisrael, often considered to be the beginning of modern Jewish settlement in Palestine. The land in question, near Jaffa, was government land acquired through a firman of the Sultan by the French *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, but the *fellahin* of the village of Yazur had farmed it for many years and thought of it as their property. When the Wali (governor) of Damascus visited the site, he was accosted by villagers who seized the reins of his mule and his trousers and demanded that the sale be annulled. Thus, 'even the first beginnings of Jewish settlement bore the seeds of later conflict' (Scholch 1993, p. 281).

The Templers faced particularly strong hatred from the local populations from the outset of their venture. Both Turks and Arabs regarded the Templers, as well as the Jews, as agents of European conspiracy. It was commonly believed that, in any anti-Christian riots that might take place, the Germans would be the first targets of the mobs. There were in fact frequent attacks and violence directed against the Templers, and Germany even dispatched gunboats off the coast in order to pressure the Ottoman authorities to protect the Templers (Carmel 1975, p. 450). The relations between Templer colonies and their neighbors are described as 'permanent guerrilla warfare' and the situation during the 1876 panic as 'a virtual state of war' (Scholch 1993, pp. 151, 275). For its part, the Ottoman government

put off registering the land purchased legally by the Templers, despite its international obligations to permit such purchases, until the 1877–78 war with Russia—where once again Ottoman dependence on European support peaked—forced it to submit to Germany's pressure on behalf of the Templers (Carmel 1981, p. 98).

The influx of European settlers, even in small numbers, galvanized the Ottoman government also to move to increase the Muslim dominance in the population. The Sultan purchased some lands in his own name, and brought in Muslim settlers from places as diverse as Algeria, Egypt, Bosnia and the Caucasus (Friedman 1986, p. 283; Scholch 1993, pp. 151, 275). If it were to develop into a demographic war, the Turks were not going to lose by default.

Jews in Ottoman Palestine

The Jewish population of the three Palestinian districts in 1881–82—the beginning of the first Zionist *aliya*, or immigration wave—consisted of about 15,000 Ottoman citizens and an estimated 5,000–10,000 unregistered residents. This was triple the estimated Jewish population of 7,000 in 1800, though Jews still constituted only 4 to 5 per cent of the total population of 462,465 (Ben-Arieh 1989–90; McCarthy 1990, p. 10). From about 1865, however, Jews were a majority in Jerusalem (Ben-Arieh 1989–90, pp. 52–53; Muslih 1988, p. 14). At the beginning of the century most of the Jewish population was of Sephardi (Middle Eastern) origin; by the end of the 1870s a clear and growing majority was Ashkenazi (of European origin) (Avitsur 1975–76, p. 26).

Western visitors in the mid-nineteenth century noted the lowly position of the existing Jewish community, concentrated in the four 'holy cities' of Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and Hebron. Herman Melville wrote that 'in the emptiness of the lifeless antiquity of Jerusalem the emigrant Jews are like flies that have taken up their abode in a skull' (Horsford and North 1989, p. 91). Henry Harris Jessup, an American missionary who spent 53 years in Beirut, declared that 'in the gradations of Oriental cursing, it is tolerably reasonable to call a man a donkey, somewhat severe to call him a dog, contemptuous to call him a swine, but withering to the last degree to call him a Jew' (Jessup 1910, p. 454). Another missionary, William Thomson, called the Jews of Safed 'an incredible and grotesque *mélange* of filth and finery, pharisaic self-righteousness and Sadducean licentiousness' (Thomson 1859, p. 426). Henry Baker Tristram, British clergyman and Biblical scholar, found the Jews of Tiberias to be 'an apt type of the decayed and scattered people, with their musty and crumbled learning' (Tristram 1866, p. 431).

The deplorable circumstances of Jews in Jerusalem attracted special attention. Up to middle of the century and beyond, the Jewish Quarter in the Old City was universally condemned for crowded and unsanitary conditions, dilapidated housing, bad water, dire poverty, malnutrition and disease (J. Finn, vol. 2, pp. 322–23;

Schmelz 1975). For some this seemed to validate a theological point; Walter Keating Kelly declared that

> here, in addition to the usual degradation and suffering of a despised, stricken, outcast race, they bend under extreme poverty, and wear the aspect of a weeping and mournful people, lamenting over their fallen greatness as a nation, and over the prostrate grandeur of their once proud city. (Kelly 1884, p. 410)

Jews were also excluded from Christian and Muslim holy sites. Finn records an instance of a Jew being attacked by a mob, and nearly killed, for crossing the far side of the square in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, p. 111). Jews were allowed to pray along a small stretch on the outside of the enclosure wall around the Temple Mount/*Haram ash-Sharif* (this is the origin of today's Western Wall). In 1840, an Ottoman decree, confirmed as late as 1911, forbid Jews from paving the area, bringing in chairs, screens, or other articles, or praying too loudly (Tibawi 1969, pp. 26–29).

In this setting, the persecution of Jews continued along historical lines. During the 1834 uprising against the Egyptian forces of Ibrahim Pasha, attacks on Jews were carried out both by Egyptian soldiers—a massacre in Hebron—and by the insurgents, who sacked Jewish homes and shops in Jerusalem (Maoz 1975). In Safed, there were violent attacks on Jews in 1834 and 1837, and in 1840 Damascus was the scene of a notorious 'blood libel' (the calumny that Jews used the blood of non-Jewish children to make *matsah*—unleavened bread—for Passover). In 1847, Jerusalem had its own 'blood libel' case when a Jewish boy was accused of wounding a Greek pilgrim boy to get his blood (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, pp. 107–10).

Ashkenazi Jews—those of European origin—had often borne the brunt of anti-Semitism. The first organized Ashkenazi community dated only from 1687, and in 1720 a mob was let loose on the Ashkenazi quarter in Jerusalem. This led to the barring, in 1723, of European Jews from entering Jerusalem. Some were finally allowed to settle there in 1815, and the Ashkenazi community was restored in 1836, during the Egyptian occupation under Ibrahim Pasha (Marmarstein 1982; Ya'ari 1958, pp. 29, 35).

Initially, European Jews had no foreign protection against arbitrary Ottoman authority or popular hostility, and were subject to constant humiliation and exploitation. Among Arabs, the wife of British Consul Finn reported, the word *Siknaj* (the Arabic corruption of Ashkenazi) was a term of contempt reflecting the image of European Jews as 'timorous'[12] Sephardi Jews, those of Middle Eastern origin, were in a relatively better position; though also facing discrimination and hostility, they fit into local culture and society and enjoyed recognition as an established community, under a Chief Rabbi whose authority was established. This gave the Sephardi community control over Jewish communal affairs such as ritual slaughtering and burial.

The Ashkenazi community, on the other hand, generally chose to remain European in culture, refusing to assimilate or to take Ottoman citizenship.

Relations with the local Arab community, unlike those of Sephardi Jews, remained strictly functional. As the numbers of European newcomers grew, they came to challenge Sephardi dominance in communal affairs, and began using the protection of the newly-established European consuls as support. In 1867, for example, they appealed to the consuls to help end the Sephardi monopoly on income from the tax on meat—and the Prussian, British and Austrian consuls undertook to arbitrate the issue (Blumberg 1985, pp. 92–94; Friedman 1986, pp. 280–81; Ya'ari 1958, pp. 73–74).

Ottoman authorities regarded European Jews as an alien element, and already in the 1850s—well before the Zionist movement came on the scene—were trying to limit the influx of Jews from Europe (Friedman 1986, p. 280; Gerber 2008, p. 129). They became particularly alarmed during the 1878 Berlin Congress—called to deal with consequences of another Russo-Turkish war—when a petition was received, purportedly representing hundreds of thousands of Jews, calling for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Ottoman Palestine (Carmel 1981, pp. 99–100).

The development of the Jewish community from the 1850s was notable. The first newspapers in Hebrew appeared during the 1860s. Moreover, because of the lack of any other common language between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, the use of spoken Hebrew as a lingua franca among Jews was noted already by James Finn in the 1850s, thus anticipating the Zionist campaign to revive Hebrew as a national language by some three decades (Avitsur 1975–76, pp. 151–53; J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, pp. 127–28, and vol. 2, p. 328).

During this period there was also a strong movement among Jews in Palestine, and especially in the Ashkenazi community, to revitalize Jewish life and move away from the dependence on charity from Jews in the Diaspora (the *halukah*). The watchword of this movement was 'productivization': learning trades, launching commercial ventures, introducing modern technology and otherwise moving to make Jews in Palestine self-supporting and self-assured. In Jerusalem, the first Jewish houses outside of the city walls were built in 1857 on land bought, with special consent of the Sultan, by the British Jewish philanthropist Moshe Montefiore. Other purchases of land for new self-sustaining Jewish neighborhoods were made in Nahlat Shiva (1867) and Me'ah She'arim (1875).

During his 1864 visit, Rev. Tristram remarked on the gardens and tended fields adjacent to the new houses built by Montefiore (J. Finn, vol. 2, p. 335; Tristram 1866, p. 414; Ya'ari 1958, pp. 49–51). Indeed, no element of 'productivization' was of greater emotional resonance in the Jewish community than the dream of agricultural settlement and a 'return to the soil' in the historical homeland.

The idea of a Jewish return to the soil also tied in with the programs of the Christian Restorationists who believed that Jews would make the land flourish once more. Herman Melville, visiting in 1857, believed that 'the idea of making farmers of the Jews is vain…The Jews dare not live outside walled towns or villages for fear of the malicious persecution of the Arabs & Turks' (Horsford and North 1989, p. 94). The most notable Restorationist was none other than James

Finn, the British Consul from 1845–63, who in addition to his diplomatic role was also a leading member of the Society for the Promotion of Christianity Amongst the Jews and who knew Jewish life well, speaking both Hebrew and Yiddish. Strongly believing in both 'productivization' and in the Jewish return to Zion, in 1852 Finn bought a plot outside the city walls (Kerem Avraham) and employed Jewish workers from Jerusalem to farm it. Despite rabbinical opposition, based on suspicion of Finn's proselytizing and on the belief that Jews in Jerusalem should engage only in sacred pursuits, Finn's project helped the idea of Jews working the soil to take root (J. Finn, vol. 2, pp. 64–86).

But nothing was more critical to building Jewish life in Palestine than the protection of the European powers. The intervention of the consuls could be critical at all three points: the initial entry into the Palestinian districts, the ability to purchase land there, and acquisition of the necessary building permits. The European governments were generally willing to provide this protection as an extension of their own policies and interests. Having *protégés* to protect helped them enlarge their own presence on Ottoman territory, and no less importantly helped them to match or block the similar activities of their European rivals engaged in the same enterprise (Carmel 1981, pp. 98–99). Humanitarian issues were not irrelevant in this context; many of the interventions involved the invocation of 'human rights' guaranteed by the Ottomans in the *Hatt-i-Humayun* and elsewhere. But the dynamics of the situation actually impelled European states into competition to find *protégés*. Jews found themselves in the unusual position of having foreign powers competing for the right to protect them.

The Russian government was, however, slow to appreciate the implications of the situation. In 1848, it actually set Russian Jews in Palestine adrift, telling them to turn elsewhere for protection (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, p. 113). The British, having few natural clients in the region by religion or nationality, stepped into the breach. The protection of Jews (at least those not belonging to another European power) became the main concern of the British Consul in Jerusalem (Hyamson 1939–41; Kayyali 1978, p. 13). This of course intertwined very closely with James Finn's own preoccupations and personal inclinations. But in addition to that he was instructed by his government that, while he was to act 'officially' only on behalf of persons actually under British protection, 'the Consul was on every suitable occasion to make known, to the local authorities, that the British Government felt an interest in the welfare of Jews in general…' (J. Finn 1878, vol. 1, p. 107).

Of course many Jews came to Palestine with Austrian, Prussian/German, French or other passports, and could claim protection as citizens of their states of origin. But the fact that the Russian Jews—the largest single group among the newcomers—turned to the British gave that nation's representatives an excellent card for intervention in internal Ottoman affairs. This continued until 1890, when Russia, realizing the utility of defending Russian Jews elsewhere (if not in Russia itself), reclaimed its jurisdiction over Russian Jews on Ottoman territory (Friedman 1986, p. 281).

In the framework of 'productivization' and European penetration, ideas of settlement of land—proto-Zionism—developed not just among Christian

Restorationists but also within the Jewish community. The idea of working the land, of a return to the soil, became a recurring theme among educated Jews. In 1860, a 'Colonization Society for Palestine' was founded in Frankfurt am Oder (Scholch 1993, p. 75). In 1870, as noted, the first Jewish agricultural school, Mikveh Yisrael, was established near Jaffa by the French *Alliance Israelite Universelle*. In 1871, settlement began in Motza, in the Judean hills near Jerusalem, on land that had been purchased in 1854. Other efforts in the 1870s to buy land near Jericho, on the coast near the modern city of Rehovot, and near Hebron all failed because of opposition to the sale of land to Jews (Ya'ari 1958, pp. 65–69). However, in 1878 a group of Jews in Jerusalem managed to buy land and begin settlement of a coastal plain area they named Petach Tikvah, which is often considered the earliest 'Zionist' settlement even though it predates Zionism.

In light of these developments it is not too surprising to find a call for an independent Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael*/Palestine published in a Jewish Jerusalem newspaper, *Sha'arei Tsion*, in 1876.[13] In light of these and other developments, one historian of the period has concluded that 'the Jews of Palestine would have eventually produced their own secular Zionism, even without the *aliyot* (immigrations) from Europe' (Landes 1976, p. 55). This is disputed by another historian who argues that 'the original and genuine character of Zionism, certainly true in the European context, is here arbitrarily projected onto Palestine' (Reinkowski 1999, p. 83). Be that as it may, clearly transformations in nineteenth century Ottoman Palestine made it, by century's end, into a much more promising setting for the Zionist enterprise than it would have been at the onset.

Conclusion

Napoleon's call for Jews to re-establish their homeland, in 1799, fell upon barren soil. Conditions in Palestine provided no opening to any massive influx of newcomers, particularly from Europe and the Jewish world—inside and outside Palestine—was not attuned to such ephemeral visions. There was no infrastructure, no guiding spirit and no clientele.

By 1880 all this was transformed. The economic base in the Palestinian districts had greatly expanded, with impressive urban growth and commercialization, better transportation, more modern technology and generally more opportunities than before. Changes in land registration had made more land available for private purchase, including sales to foreign buyers. Security throughout the region had vastly improved, making it safer for new ventures by both citizens and foreigners.

But while internal security may have advanced, the Ottoman Empire as a whole, and its hold on the Palestinian districts, was demonstrably weaker in the late nineteenth century. Rescued from defeat and possible dissolution three times during the century, the Sultan was forced into humiliating dependence on the

European powers—and on his skill in playing them off against each other. As a result the Ottoman regime was forced to concede a much greater European presence in its own territory, and especially in the religiously sensitive 'Holy Land'. Exclusion from this area by Turkish authorities, and the hostility of Arab residents, were both overcome in a series of inroads that breached one barrier after another. The Capitulations, initially limited to European jurisdiction over Europeans within the empire, became a tool for European intervention in the relations of large communities of non-Muslims with their own government.

The particular religious significance of Palestine to Christians was given expression in a huge expansion of Western-oriented religious, charitable, educational and even economic institutions. This extended to encouragement of a larger Jewish presence, in the form of Christian Restorationist programs for a Jewish return to Zion. Even the Ottoman regime recognized the special place of the Holy Land in the Western world, in a backhanded way, when it established the Jerusalem district as an independent district directly under the rule of Constantinople.

The growing Western presence also provided a model of European settlement in Palestine, in the form of the German Templer movement. While remaining numerically small, the successful establishment of seven settlements showed that, despite the obstacles, such settlement was viable. Simultaneously, the Jewish community in Palestine tripled in size during this period, became more European in its composition, and began the first steps toward building a self-sustaining foundation based on modern trades and agriculture.

All of these developments stirred up increased resistance and hostility from both Turks and Arabs, though what had previously been mainly religious animosity became increasingly civilizational: antipathy toward Europeans as such. In this framework, Jewish immigrants from Europe were regarded with greater aversion than the native Sephardi Jewish population. The Ottoman authorities and the Arab public, it was clear, would see any future Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the framework of their overall struggle against European penetration in all its forms.

One of the leading historians of Ottoman Palestine has pointed out that Zionism was but one of many European movements dedicated to the 'reclamation' of Palestine (Scholch 1993, p. 48). This is true, but the success of Zionism compared to the other movements is due primarily to a factor that was absent in the others. All the movements had a 'pull' factor in the form of religious yearnings and/or the nationalism sweeping nineteenth-century Europe. But Zionism also had a hugely influential 'push' factor: the outbreak of a new racial anti-Semitism in late nineteenth-century Eastern Europe. But that is beyond the scope of this article.

Notes

1. 'Napoleon Bonaparte's Letter to the Jews, 20 April 1799', MidEastWeb, http://mideastweb.org/napoleon1799.htm
2. For general descriptions of the early nineteenth century, see Avitsur (1975–76), Brawer (1990) and Scholch (1993).

3. Vidal Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban, Palestine* (Paris: Leroux, 1896), 564, cited by Shamir (1975, p. 510).
4. 'Der Ackerbau in Palastina', *Heilige Land*, 116 (1872): 117ff, cited in Scholch (1993, p. 71).
5. *Survey of Western Palestine,* vol. 2, *Samaria* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Kedem Publisher), 256, quoted in Scholch (1993, p. 73).
6. On the Templers generally, see Carmel (1975).
7. Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Hahavatselet*, no. 1, 12 Tishri 5742 (5 October 1881).
8. Document in Khalidi Library, Jerusalem, quoted by Khalidi (2000, p. 223).
9. Twain (2002: 349, 408). The book was originally published in 1869.
10. Burton (1884). The book covers a trip in 1869–71.
11. J. Finn (vol. 2, 447). See also Scholch (1993, p. 272) and Idinopulos (1998, pp. 101–02).
12. Elizabeth Anne Finn (1923, p. 28). The book is a collection of articles written between 1845 and 1862.
13. *Sha'arei Tsion*, ed. Yeshayahu Press, November 16, 1876, cited in Kressel (1963–64, p. 57).

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