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THE INVENTION OF A TRADITION

The Question of Arab Acceptance of the Zionist Right to Palestine during World War I

CHARLES D. SMITH

An essay occasioned by the republication of *The Question of Palestine: British-Jewish-Arab Relations, 1914-1918*, by Isaiah Friedman.*

The Question of Palestine first appeared in 1973. It contributed to a tradition, encouraged also by the late Elie Kedourie, that Great Britain's dealings with Arab notables during World War I were honest and direct. Summarized as briefly as possible, this tradition argues that British officials in Cairo, after hurried consultation with the Foreign Office in London, promised that

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* Second, expanded edition. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992. LXV + 332 pages. Notes and bibliography to p. 426. Index to p. 433. \$24.95 paper.

certain Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire would be independent after the war. These promises, never embodied in an official treaty, were contained in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence covering the period from July 1915 to February 1916. The correspondents were the Sharif Husayn of Mecca and Sir Henry McMahon, the high commissioner in Cairo, and the exchanges resulted eventually in the Arab Revolt of June 1916.¹

According to this tradition, subsequent British treaties with her European allies, notably the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that distributed these Arab lands between Britain and France, fulfilled the promises of Arab independence made to Sharif Husayn. Indeed, the agreement's negotiators, Mark Sykes and Georges Picot, supposedly told Husayn the details of the agreement in 1917 and gained his acceptance of its terms. Later British or Anglo-French assurances (1917-18) of Arab independence, in this view, were not inconsistent with great power arrangements for control of the region after the war.²

A key element in the creation of this tradition has to do with "The Question of Palestine." Palestine was not mentioned in Sharif Husayn's first letter to McMahon although it fell within the boundaries of the Arab state or confederation of states that he proposed; no regions were specified. But in later exchanges, McMahon identified areas and administrative districts as either important to the British and deserving special status (Baghdad and Basra vilayets) or as territory that he sought to reserve for France such as coastal Syria (including the Lebanon) and southeast Anatolia; Palestine was never referred to in the give-and-take over these proposals. Neither were the lands where British promises were qualified by a deliberately vague reference to her obligations to "her ally, France." Husayn rejected McMahon's exclusions in principle while leaving their resolution until war's end.³

Friedman and Kedourie both argue, with widely differing emphases, that Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, a self-appointed intermediary of Sharif Husayn's, either directly (according to Friedman) or indirectly (according to Kedourie) acknowledged that Palestine could be excluded from Arab demands. They are in complete agreement that Sharif Husayn, when interviewed by David Hogarth in January 1918, accepted the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist right to Palestine.⁴ This article is devoted to Friedman's study, but I shall refer where appropriate to Kedourie and to other scholars who, unlike Friedman and Kedourie, contribute to the thesis outlined above more by interpretation than by misrepresentation of sources.⁵

Isaiah Friedman, a professor of history at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, had first summarized this thesis in a 1970 article that appeared in the *Journal of Contemporary History* and in his rejoinder to comments on that article by Arnold Toynbee, who had been a member of the Political Intelligence Department in the British Foreign Office in 1918.⁶ Friedman is also the author of *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism, 1897-1918* (1977), and is the editor and annotator of the first twelve volumes, spanning the period 1840-1920, of *The Rise of Israel: A Documentary Record* (1988).

This new edition of *The Question of Palestine* reflects the addition of an introductory chapter titled "British Schemes for the Restoration of Jews to Palestine, 1840–1880." It reveals, according to Friedman, a long-standing British interest in restoring the Jews to Palestine, an interest indicating that the road to the Balfour Declaration could actually be traced to the sixteenth century (p. ix). Beyond this new introduction, however, the text stands as published in 1973. The extensive bibliography remains as originally compiled, meaning that no scholarship of the past twenty years has been considered. He has used British Foreign Office and Cabinet documents, private papers, and documents found in the Central Zionist Archives.⁷

According to Friedman, he began his research because of questions raised by his reading of Leonard Stein's *The Balfour Declaration* (1961). The strength of the book lies in Friedman's tracing of British-Zionist contacts and Zionist discussions regarding their future aspirations. His material adds to Stein's but does not challenge the latter's findings. Both books have been superseded, for the moment at least, on the broader topic of Zionism, if not the Balfour Declaration, by Vital's *Zionism: The Crucial Phase*.⁸

Where Friedman goes far beyond Stein is in his extensive investigation of the question of whether Britain had, if only inadvertently, promised Palestine to the Sharif Husayn of Mecca in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence. Stein very briefly (pp. 266–69) dismisses the idea, arguing with respect to the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that Palestine's designation as an international zone under that agreement in no way violated promises given to Sharif Husayn. He does not analyze the Husayn-McMahon correspondence.

Friedman does so at great length in order to assert, as had Stein and later Vereté, that Palestine had been reserved by McMahon.⁹ Indeed, Friedman contends that the Young Arab Party, with which Husayn had been in contact in 1914–15, was itself willing to cede not only Palestine but much of coastal Syria and the Lebanon, along with most of Iraq. What Arab nationalists really wanted as an independent state, according to Friedman, was merely the narrow strip in Syria defined by the cities of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo and extending southward to include the region east of the Jordan River, later Transjordan, and the Arabian peninsula; existing British links to Aden and the Gulf shaykhdoms would be acknowledged. Friedman thus claims, as did Kedourie, that the Sykes-Picot Agreement fulfilled Britain's promises made to Husayn in 1915, especially in McMahon's letter of 24 October.¹⁰

According to Friedman, McMahon's reservations were accepted by both Sharif Husayn and Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, who "themselves excluded [Palestine] from their desiderata since, unlike the Syrian interior, it was not a purely Arab territory" (*QP*, p. 330). Indeed, "Al-Faruqi specifically mentioned Palestine by name when excluding it, as well as the Syrian littoral, from the area destined to become an Arab state" (*JCH*, p. 199; see also pp. 105–7). They did this because Palestine was inhabited by members of a

“foreign race,” meaning about 100,000 Jews (*QP*, pp. 84, 330).¹¹ Friedman, and Vereté, thus argue that Palestine was part of the “northwest” region reserved, but not referred to as such, by McMahon in his 24 October 1915 letter to Husayn. In fact, the “northwest” region comprised the areas west *and north* of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo that McMahon declared to be not “purely Arab.” This reservation supposedly met with Husayn’s and al-Faruqi’s approval.¹²

Further acceptance came in Husayn’s apparent recognition of Zionist claims to Palestine during the visit of David Hogarth to Jidda in January 1918. Both Friedman and Kedourie reject the claim made by George Antonius that Hogarth’s depiction of the Balfour Declaration altered its original meaning. Hogarth had told Husayn that the declaration, in Britain’s opinion, guaranteed “the economic and *political* freedom of the existing population” (emphasis added), whereas the original text mentioned only the “civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish population.”¹³

Kedourie states that Hogarth simply “reiterated” the Balfour Declaration clauses, but Friedman, while agreeing, moves to higher ground. In his view, “legally the Hogarth Message could not overrule an earlier commitment of greater weight” (*QP*, p. 328), and in any case, “The Palestinian Arabs had not the status of hosts whose approval of the Jewish National Home had to be solicited; the Jews had an unalienable right to Palestine independently of Arab wishes” (*QP*, p. 330).

There is, for Friedman, a juridical quality to Zionist claims independent of Arab acceptance which, he insists, did occur. At the same time, Friedman stresses that Arabs in general, and Palestinians in particular, had no right to challenge British-French “legitimate interests in the region” (*QP*, p. 67), and that the Zionists served Britain’s imperial interests far more than did the Arabs; indeed, Friedman notes approvingly that “Zionism thus helped to legitimise Britain’s position in Palestine, which otherwise would have been based solely on military conquest” (*QP*, p. 305). The argument therefore has four aspects: British-French rights to decide the fate of the region in pursuit of their legitimate imperial interests; the blending of Zionist goals and British imperial ambitions; Jewish rights to Palestine independent of Arab wishes; and in any case explicit Arab acceptance of Palestine’s exclusion from land to be considered Arab.

I have elaborated Friedman’s arguments with quotations because his book purports to be a work of disinterested scholarship. He refers to official documents to back his contentions, and declares at the end of his response to Arnold Toynbee that “Whether or not the subject has any political bearing [*sic*], is not for me to say. For me it was and remains an academic issue and I hope I treated it in that spirit” (*JCH*, p. 201). Disputes over the meaning of McMahon’s 24 October letter have created a “myth” regarding the position of Palestine between Arab and Jew, according to Friedman, but Britain’s record was “clean.”

Unfortunately, Friedman's own record is not as clean as he would like Britain's to be. He has manipulated sources, omitting material from some and misrepresenting others, in order to reach his conclusions. As a result, this book, when dealing with Arab issues, does not meet even the most basic professional standards expected of scholarly inquiry. I will elaborate, noting certain errors as well as buttressing my charge of manipulation of sources.

Friedman's treatment of the Husayn-McMahon correspondence is deeply flawed. First, when referring to the matter of what Arab independence signified, he argues (*QP*, p. 66) that it essentially meant the independence of the Muslim holy places. He confuses one year with another here, stating that Sir Edward Grey's communication of 14 April to this effect led directly to the Arab Revolt of June 1916. Gray's communication was dated 14 April 1915, a year earlier. Furthermore, its status as an official statement, while protecting the British government, did not mitigate the impact of British propaganda leaflets that had been dropped over the Hijaz, Palestine, and Syria since December 1914 promising independence to all these regions in order to draw the Arabs to the British side. In other words, the boundaries of Arab independence claimed by the Sharif Husayn in his first letter to Henry McMahon approximated the lands promised to be independent in the British leaflets, as distinct from Grey's pronouncement.

Far more serious is the question of whether Palestine was promised to Sharif Husayn in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence. My own position is that of British officials, including Arthur Balfour, who believed that it had been, if only inadvertently, that is, by not being specifically excluded. There is little doubt that the British intended to reserve it for disposal, in agreement with France if necessary. There is also little doubt that the allies reserved all issues for disposal according to their needs at the end of the war, regardless of promises made to third parties, or, in Britain's case, to her ally France. Imperial power had its prerogatives and, in Balfour's view at least, required no apologies. What is remarkable is how eager Friedman and Kedourie are to apologize for this power by arguing for a purity, as opposed to sincerity, of motives not felt by most British officials at the time.

How does Friedman deal with this subject? Let us first address his claim that al-Faruqi and Husayn excluded Palestine from the lands they claimed should be Arab. For evidence, Friedman refers to a "Memorandum [on the Young Arab Party]" by Gilbert Clayton, head of military intelligence in Cairo, dated 11 October 1915.¹⁴ He relies on this memorandum for his further contention that the Young Arab Party was willing to take only Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, leaving Palestine and western Syria to the French, and Iraq to the British. He buttresses his statements by references to two letters sent by Mark Sykes on 20 and 22 November 1915, the first to London and the second, not identified by Friedman, to Percy Cox in Basra.

What do the documents actually say? A sampling of quotations will illustrate Friedman's style and his accuracy of representing documents. First, Clayton in his memorandum quotes al-Faruqi to the effect that

They [Young Arab Party] realise that to attempt to carry out the idea of an Arab Empire in its entirety is probably outside the region of practical politics at present, and he at any rate appreciates the fact that England is bound by obligations to her Allies in this war. . . .

El-Farugi states that a guarantee of the independence of the Arabian Peninsula would not satisfy them, but this together with an institution of an increasing measure of autonomous government under British guidance and control, in Palestine and Mesopotamia, would probably secure their programme. Syria is of course included in their programme but they must realise that France has aspirations in this region, although El Farugi declares that a French occupation of Syria would be strenuously resisted by the Mohammadan people. They would however no doubt seek England's good offices towards obtaining a settlement of the Syrian question in a manner as favourable as possible to their views and would almost certainly press for the inclusion of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Homs in the Arab Confederation. In El Farugi's own words "our schemes embrace all the Arab countries including Syria and Mesopotamia, but if we cannot have all we want as much as we can get. . . ." [Clayton concluded that] the influential leaders appear open to reason and ready to accept considerably less ambitious schemes than that which they have formulated, which the more enlightened allow to be beyond their hopes at present.

It will be seen that Palestine as well as Mesopotamia are mentioned specifically as essential requisites for guarantees of Arab independence, to be developed under British tutelage, with Syria hoped for in its entirety. On the other hand, the Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo line is the minimum the Arabs will settle for in Syria, along with Palestine and Mesopotamia. Clayton notes twice that the Arabs recognize that they cannot achieve all their goals "at present."

We can contrast this material with the version based on the Clayton memorandum that Friedman presents (*QP*, p. 82; *JCH*, pp. 105–7). In the former source he states:

Al-Faruqi conveyed the impression that the aims of [the] societies were moderate. They fully realised that the establishment of an Arab Empire, as they visualised it, was *entirely* [emphasis added] outside the realm of practical politics: in al-Faruqi's own words: "our scheme embraces all the Arab countries, including Syria and Mesopotamia, but if we cannot have all, we want as much as we can get." They appreciated that in the regions in question England was bound by her obligations to her Allies and they *would recognise the French position in Syria* [emphasis added]. The point on which the Young Arabs would not budge was the inclusion of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Homs in the Arab Confederation. Otherwise, Clayton noted, the leaders of the Arab societies were "open to reason and ready to accept a considerably less ambitious scheme than that which they formulated" earlier.

Friedman does not mention Palestine in this quotation although he claims, relying on this memorandum, that al-Faruqi specifically excluded it from Arab demands (*QP*, pp. 82–84; *JCH*, pp. 105–7, 199). As we can see, he specifically included it. The Arabs did not "recognise the French position in Syria" according to Clayton. He noted that they were aware of French "aspirations" there and would oppose them. The Arabs did not see their dream of

an empire as "entirely" impractical nor did they abandon it; they were willing, in Clayton's words, to defer these ambitions "at present," meaning for the moment.

Friedman then pursues this theme further, arguing that al-Faruqi, in conversations with Mark Sykes, accepted an Arab state limited to the four Syrian cities, the future Transjordan, and Arabia. He thus recognized separate French and British spheres of influence where Arab aspirations for independence were renounced, meaning Palestine, coastal Lebanon and Syria, and Iraq (*QP*, p. 83; *JCH*, pp. 106–7).¹⁵

There is no evidence for these assertions. Sykes states in his first letter that the Arabs would grant the French concessionary privileges in Palestine and Syria, the same in Iraq for the British. It is clear, though implicit, that this is within the framework of an Arab state or states granting such concessions. No mention of Damascus, Homs, Hama, or Aleppo as reserved for an Arab state is made. This meaning is clarified in Sykes' second letter two days later, to Cox, where he states that the Arabs desire an independent state or confederation including the "vilayets of Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, Mosul, Baghdad, and Sanjaks of Urfa, Deir Zor, Jerusalem." This independence would be "qualified" for reasons of protection and assistance by agreements with France and Great Britain, but appointment of British or French officials was subject to Arab approval. Friedman's interpretations are thus untenable.

It is important for Friedman to establish these points, helped by rearrangement of chronology, because they lead to his basic contention that Palestine, by being ceded to the French by the Arabs, was willingly excluded from Arab lands *before* McMahon wrote his letter of 24 October 1915 to the Sharif Husayn.¹⁶ Thus, McMahon supposedly assumed Palestine's exclusion and so informed the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, on 26 October.

As Friedman presents the matter (*QP*, pp. 85–86; *JCH*, p. 109), McMahon wrote the following dispatch that Friedman reproduces with an ellipsis inserted:

I am not aware of the extent of French claims in Syria, nor of how far His Majesty's Government have agreed to recognise them. Hence . . . I have endeavoured to provide for possible French pretensions to those places by a general modification to the effect that His Majesty's Government can only give assurances in regard to those territories "in which she can act without detriment to the interests of her ally France."

Friedman then declares that "The territory about which McMahon was dubious as to the extent of French claims being recognised by the British Government was Palestine, or more precisely the Sanjak of Jerusalem" (p. 86). He concludes that as the British had reserved Palestine for the French, with Arab approval, the Zionist claim to Palestine was legitimate on these grounds, not simply on the basis of the Jewish right to that land.

The problem is that the material obscured by the ellipsis reads as follows: "[Hence] while recognising the towns of Damascus, Hama Homs and Aleppo as being within the circle of Arab countries. . . ." McMahon never mentions

Palestine in the letter, and Friedman has had to use an ellipsis in the quotation in order to obscure that fact and to claim that he did. He thus falsifies the document, unlike Vereté who simply contradicts himself.¹⁷ Such a misrepresentation of a document violates all scholarly criteria.

Further misuse of documents appears in Friedman's and Kedourie's contention that Arabs agreed specifically to Palestine's exclusion from postwar independent Arab territory. This led both to state that David Hogarth, based in Cairo, presented the details of the Balfour Declaration in full to Sharif Husayn and that the latter accepted them, meaning that he recognized the Zionist right to Palestine. As noted above, this argument relied on the conclusion that to tell Husayn that the political rights of the Palestinian Arabs would be protected was identical with the intent of the declaration. This in itself is untrue. Beyond this, however, is the representation of Hogarth's report of his visit.

Friedman does not quote from Hogarth's report. He merely argues (*QP*, pp. 328–29; *JCH*, pp. 196–97) that Hogarth's message did not depart from the Balfour Declaration and that Husayn “[came] to terms with it.” Kedourie goes further. He states that Husayn “enthusiastically assented” to Zionist settlement in Palestine and was “[unconcerned] over the Balfour Declaration and Zionist aims” (*AAL*, pp. 190–91).

This is an important statement. Kedourie cites portions of Hogarth's report but omits a key sentence and misrepresents the entire matter. He quotes Hogarth correctly as stating that Husayn “probably knows little or nothing of the actual or possible economy of Palestine and his ready assent to Jewish settlement there is not worth very much.”¹⁸ But the paragraph in full reads as follows:

The King would not accept an independent Jew state in Palestine nor was I instructed to warn him that such a State was contemplated by Great Britain [emphasis added]. He probably knows little or nothing of the actual or possible economy of Palestine and his ready assent to Jewish settlement there is not worth very much. But I think he appreciates the financial advantages of Arab cooperation with the Jews.

Kedourie therefore withholds Hogarth's acknowledgment that he withheld from Husayn the nature of Zionist goals which he knew Husayn would repudiate; this enables Kedourie to claim that Husayn was unconcerned over Zionist aims. While not an insertion of ellipses to obscure material, this is a serious misrepresentation of a document and a violation of scholarly standards.

What Husayn accepted was Zionist “settlement” in Palestine in a context where Arab political as well as economic interests were apparently guaranteed by the British in light of Hogarth's message, a major alteration of the intention of the Balfour Declaration. Antonius, not Kedourie, is correct on this matter. Where Antonius errs is in assuming this was a sincere British “assurance” of their own intentions. Rather, the Hogarth message was a necessary circumlocution designed to ensure Arab acquiescence in British ex-

pansion into Arab lands and to retain Husayn's cooperation against the Turks.¹⁹

In the same vein, Chaim Weizmann told the Amir Faysal in June 1918 that the Zionists had no wish to create a Jewish government in Palestine and promised financial assistance as had Hogarth to Husayn. He did so in order to gain Arab acceptance of the Balfour Declaration and in order to prevent Arabs from resisting British occupation of the region now that the declaration had been publicized. This is a good example of the Zionist service to British imperial goals to which Friedman alludes and about which Weizmann, who consistently stressed the complementarity of British-Zionist objectives, himself complained at times.²⁰

Palestine, therefore, was neither specifically promised to Sharif Husayn nor specifically excluded by Henry McMahon. It did fall within the boundaries defining Arab independence requested in Husayn's first letter to McMahon, and it was logical for him to expect that it retained that status. Conversely, Palestine was apparently pledged to be Jewish in 1917, with a Jewish state being the ultimate goal according to the spirit, but not the text, of the Balfour Declaration; the wording of the document was ambiguous.²¹

Whether Sharif Husayn or Amir Faysal would have ever agreed to a Jewish state that denied Palestinian Arabs their right to a separate political entity is another question, one that cannot be given a definitive answer. The sources do show, however, that their acceptance of Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1918 was predicated on British recognition of Palestinian Arab political rights. In addition, the Zionist goal of a Jewish state in Palestine was omitted from Hogarth's presentation to Sharif Husayn, because Hogarth knew he opposed it. The aim was specifically denied by Weizmann to Amir Faysal.

There is no doubt that Faysal, at the peace conference in 1919, excluded Palestine from the area to fall within the independent Arab state envisioned for Syria. Nevertheless, that did not deny the possible existence of a separate Arab political entity or Arab sovereignty in Palestine; specific mention of Palestine as a Jewish state does not appear in the Faysal-Weizmann agreement of January 1919. What Faysal did recognize was "the moral claims of the Zionists" and that there were "conflicting claims," but he knew that the Palestinian Arabs were "the enormous majority" and presented Arabs as believing that their "interests [regarding Palestine] . . . may safely be left in the hands of the British Government."²²

It seems clear that both sides were maneuvering to gain great power acceptance of their objectives. In Faysal's case, he also wished to hold out the possibility of receiving Zionist financial contributions for his anti-French efforts in Syria, as he had been encouraged to expect by Weizmann. Thus he could state in an interview with *Le Matin* in March 1919 that he opposed a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine and, at the request of Weizmann, declare Arab sympathy with Zionist aspirations in a letter to Felix Frankfurter shortly afterwards. In all of this, Palestinian Arab views were ignored because they were known to oppose Zionist goals, which for some included the expulsion

of the Arab population to make room for incoming Jewish immigrants; this had been publicized during 1918.²³

It is clear that Arab notables, on the basis of information given by British officials, distinguished between Jewish immigration (settlement) and a Jewish state: these were not synonymous to them, as suggested by Friedman and Kedourie. Conversely, Zionist leaders were frank in their discussions with British and other Europeans, as opposed to Arabs, noting that Jewish immigration would lead eventually to a Jewish state once a Jewish majority was achieved. British officials had no illusions on the matter.

It is equally clear, therefore, that the tradition of Arab acceptance during World War I of the exclusion of Palestine from areas to fall under Arab sovereignty, as based on the sources used by Friedman and Kedourie, is an invention, one that has required an imaginative interpretation and exploitation of documents not consonant with scholarly practices.

This invention has also required an assault on interpretations given by George Antonius, which as noted have been described as "worthless" by Kedourie with respect to the Hogarth version of the Balfour Declaration. A recent critical essay on Antonius argues that *The Arab Awakening* "is more suggestive of a sustained argument than a history." This is essentially what Friedman says of Vital's work. The appraisal applies in some instances to Kedourie's work on this subject and certainly to Friedman's *Question of Palestine*, the latter two authors' greater scholarly paraphernalia notwithstanding. Antonius may have invented his own tradition of an ongoing Arab national movement dating back to the 1860s, a good example of the nationalist search for antecedents postulated by Hobsbawm. Nevertheless, his discussion of Husayn's view of the correspondence with McMahon and the general tenor of developments during World War I shows far more respect for the sources, as available to him, than do these other accounts, especially Friedman's.²⁴

In his foreword to this edition, Friedman thanks his publishers for reissuing this book: "Its republication was long overdue." The blurb on the back cover promises a sequel, also to be published by Transaction. It will demand the close attention that this book should have received on first appearance, especially if there are key documents quoted with ellipses inserted. While one should expect that interpretations of evidence may differ, this assumes a respect for the sources that is lacking in *The Question of Palestine*. Its main contribution is to show how not to use sources and how evidence can be misused for political ends.

One would hope that the tradition to which it contributed is accepted as false. One would also hope that future discussions on these topics would adhere to scholarly standards when referring to sources, whatever interpretations are derived from them. But that will demand a respect for the humanity of individual actors on both sides, Arab as well as European, and recognition that they sought to achieve widely divergent objectives within a framework defined by wartime expediencies and imperial ambition. Otherwise we will continue to see expressions of contempt by scholars towards Arabs that re-

flect culturally what their blatantly Orientalist writings strive to validate, the very imperialism the context of which they should be seeking to understand and explain rather than simply defend.

NOTES

1. The title of this article derives from the book, *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In his introduction, Hobsbawm notes that the idea refers generally to social or national traditions created to validate contemporary situations and positions. But he observes also that "... all historians, whatever else their objectives, are engaged in this process inasmuch as they contribute, consciously or not, to the creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere of man as a political being. They might as well be aware of this dimension of their activities" (p. 13). I am suggesting in this article that historians can invent traditions or myths of what individuals or governments did by either ignoring evidence or omitting it from sources. Therefore, in Hobsbawm's words, they are not only "creating, dismantling and restructuring images of the past," but doing the same to the sources on which they base their arguments.

2. I will refer to the Sykes-Picot Agreement only briefly (see below and note nos. 5 and 10) as this essay focuses on questions about Palestine. However, the contemporary evidence suggests that Sykes misled Husayn and did not inform him in detail of the provisions of the agreement, contrary to the claims of both Kedourie and Friedman.

3. The Husayn-McMahon correspondence can be found in George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, Appendix A. First published in 1938, the book has gone through various editions. I refer to the Capricorn paper edition (New York, 1965), pp. 413-27. The key letter defining, or appearing to define, territorial guarantees and reservations was that of McMahon to Sharif Husayn dated 24 October 1915.

4. I am more concerned here with the representation of the Balfour Declaration given to Husayn by Hogarth, at the time with the Arab Bureau in Cairo, than with the declaration itself or the events leading up to it. I will note below, however, disputes in Zionist historiography over the background to the declaration.

5. In particular, Kedourie's *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations, 1914-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), hereafter, *AAL*, and Mayir Vereté, "The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers," *Middle Eastern Studies* 6 (1970), pp. 48-76, republished in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim, eds., *Palestine and Israel in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Frank Cass, 1982); pp. 60-88; I will refer to the republished article. Vereté's errors are those of interpretation, not of re-drafting material to fit preconceptions. He is more concerned with the Balfour Declaration than preliminary developments such as the Husayn-McMahon corres-

pondence, but is misleading on the latter when referring to them.

With respect to Kedourie and Friedman, Kedourie deals more fully and accurately with the source material regarding Palestine than does Friedman and acknowledges its inclusion in some of al-Faruqi's territorial references. He then argues that al-Faruqi left open the possibility of compromise which could exclude Palestine (see *AAL*, pp. 79-93ff.). Kedourie is adamant, however, on the compatibility of the correspondence with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and on Husayn's acceptance of the latter, even though he admits that the transmission of the details may have been ambiguous (*AAL*, pp. 125-26; 165-66 for example). Kedourie had already argued this point in his "Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question, 1915-1918," republished in *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1984), pp. 13-32, where he excoriates British officials who assumed any incompatibility. For his discussion of the 1918 Hogarth visit to Husayn, to be discussed below, see *AAL*, pp. 189-95, 282-89.

This contradictory treatment of the issues, first presenting the sources relatively fully and then arguing against their implications, is characteristic of Kedourie. His inconsistencies have been pointed out in a critical review of *AAL* by C. Ernest Dawn, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 1978), pp. 128-30.

There are important differences also in the qualifications of both authors. Kedourie knew Arabic and occasionally used Arabic sources in his studies of British policymaking. Friedman does not know Arabic as evidenced by his sources. Their tones vary considerably. Friedman is urbane ("The dispute . . . can now be comfortably resolved. . ." [p. 95]) whereas Kedourie often directs unconcealed anger and contempt at Arab leaders and at the British officials who appeared to agree with them regarding the nature of British promises (" . . . there was in Britain a miasm of guilt and self-incrimination, of penitence and breast-beating which hung over relations with the Arab world" [*AAL*, p. 318]).

6. Isaiah Friedman, "The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence and the Question of Palestine," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (April 1970), pp. 83-122; Arnold Toynbee, "The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence: Comments and a Reply," and Friedman's response, *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (October 1970), pp. 185-201. As I will compare Friedman in his articles and book, *The Question of Palestine*, I will refer to these sources as *JCH* and *QP*, respectively.

7. The lack of revision in itself detracts seriously from the scholarly value of this work. Briefly, regarding Arab nationalism there is no reference to the work of C. Ernest Dawn whose articles from the 1950s and 1960s on

the Arab parties before and during World War I were published in one volume as *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973). In particular, an essay written for the volume, "Hashemite Aims and Policy in the Light of Recent Scholarship on Anglo-Arab Relations During World War I," pp. 87-122, challenges Friedman's arguments as presented in his *JCH* article. Kedourie, whose book appeared in 1976, also ignores Dawn's work which, though not benefiting from access to the original documents, is more reliable than either Friedman or Kedourie.

On British diplomacy during the war, among the important studies disregarded are: V. H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (1971); F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (1977) in which there are two pertinent articles: Zara Steiner's "The Foreign Office Under Sir Edward Grey, 1905-1914" and Marian Kent's "Asiatic Turkey, 1914-1916"; Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil, 1900-1920* (1976); and David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (1986).

On Zionism, supposedly the strength of this work, there is no mention of the trilogy by David Vital. I refer to *The Origins of Zionism* (1975); *Zionism: The Formative Years* (1982); and *Zionism: The Crucial Phase* (1987), the bulk of which covers the period 1914-1919.

Friedman clearly dislikes Vital's work and has written a harsh indictment of *Zionism: The Crucial Phase*. He calls it "an historical essay rather than a solid piece of research" and concludes that "it does little justice to its title, let alone the subject itself" in his review "Zionist History Reconsidered," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 6 (1990), pp. 309-14. Part of his anger lies in Vital's supposed nonrecognition of previous scholarship, presumably his own, though he is listed in the bibliographical essay.

A more restrained but consequently more impressive critique, with a broader perspective, is by Evyatar Friesel ("David Vital's Work on Zionism," *Studies in Zionism* 9, no. 2 [1988], pp. 209-23), who concludes that despite "Vital's impeccable research and elegant style, the story told . . . makes poor historical sense." In contrast, Friedman's injured tone detracts from his arguments against Vital. Also, he is wrong in stressing (*contra* Vital) British antipathy to annexation of territory under the Asquith-Grey cabinet as he could have learned by reading the Kent essay on "Asiatic Turkey" noted above. For further discussion see note no. 8.

8. Historians of Zionism still debate with great intensity the antecedents and inspirations of the Balfour Declaration. Vital extols Vereté's article, "The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers" (see note no. 5), and joins him in downplaying the role of Weizmann's persuasive talents. Both stress instead British eagerness for such a declaration with Vital offering an unfavorable portrait of Weizmann. Many others, including Friedman, Friesel, and this writer, consider Weizmann's efforts on balance as more crucial to British awareness of Zionism and sympathy for it than any mere consideration of their own interests.

Jehuda Reinharz, "The Balfour Declaration and Its Maker: A Reassessment," *Journal of Modern History* 64 (September 1992), pp. 455-99, especially pp. 491-93ff., summarizes the conflicting viewpoints and lists the review essays of Friedman and Friesel critical of Vital's work (see note no. 7). Though I side with them in their

evaluation of Weizmann's role, Friesel's essay is more analytical. Especially noteworthy is his judgment that the "Historiography dealing with the Balfour Declaration must be one of the classic examples of professional myopia" (p. 220). He concludes that most analyses of the Balfour Declaration ignore broader British policy considerations in which the declaration was of "secondary importance" at the time, and that "the story of British-Zionist relations . . . is one of Zionist initiative and British [qualified] consent" (pp. 222-23) where Weizmann's role was crucial.

Stein's work remains highly regarded, and deservedly so. Vital praises Stein but chastises him for his reluctance to pass judgments (*Zionism: The Crucial Phase*, p. 383), a fault conspicuously absent in the reviews of his own work just cited. In general, Stein presents documentary evidence without passing judgment, though there are exceptions, as when dealing with Arab lands with respect to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, discussed below.

9. Vereté argues, without reference to the specific letters, that McMahon "intimidated [to Husayn] that Palestine too could not be included within the limits of territories regarding which H.M.G. were prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs." There is no evidence for such an assertion and Vereté provides none ("The Balfour Declaration," p. 63).

10. *QP*, pp. 67, 81-86, 116-17, 210; *JCH*, pp. 105-7, 119. Briefly, the Sykes-Picot Agreement established areas of direct control over Arab lands by France (Mt. Lebanon, northern Palestine and western Syria) and Great Britain (Iraq from Baghdad south to Basra and the Gulf) along with regions that would be supposedly independent but that were reserved as spheres of influence for either country. The Damascus-Homs-Hama-Aleppo grid and points east were within the independent sphere subject to France, which had a monopoly on advisors. Most of Palestine would be internationalized, with Britain having control over the ports of Haifa and Acre. The clearest discussion of these matters, as opposed to either Friedman or Kedourie, is still Jukka Nevakivi, *Britain, France, and the Arab Middle East, 1914-1920* (1969).

Some historians of Zionism have relied on Vereté for their interpretation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and thus assume that Sykes regretted the accord. In fact, Sykes and British officials generally saw the agreement at the time as a victory because internationalization removed the bulk of Palestine from the scope of direct French control as initially demanded by Picot, and reserved key ports for British supervision. See Vereté's speculations ("The Balfour Declaration," p. 66), and their reiteration by Jehuda Reinharz ("The Balfour Declaration," p. 492 [see note no. 8]).

This assumption leads Reinharz and Vital, both relying on Vereté, to argue that one British motive for subsequently issuing the Balfour Declaration was "their desire to eliminate the French from Palestine, a position they were entitled to by . . . the Sykes-Picot Agreement" (Reinharz, p. 492). This is dubious given British reluctance to assume responsibility for Palestine after issuing the declaration and the fact that France had no unilateral rights in most of Palestine through the agreement.

11. Al-Faruqi, an Ottoman officer of Iraqi origin, deserted to the British side at Gallipoli in August 1915. A member of the Young Arab Party, he claimed to know of Sharif Husayn's demands for Arab independence,

which had just been received in Cairo. He was interviewed extensively by British officials in Cairo prior to McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 to Sharif Husayn. For an evaluation of al-Faruqi's background and his credibility, see Eliezer Tauber, "The Role of Lieutenant Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi—New Light on Anglo-Arab Relations During the First World War," *Asian and African Studies* 24 (1990), pp. 17-50.

Dawn (see note no. 5) argues that al-Faruqi had very little impact on McMahon's letters to Husayn, the opposite of Kedourie's and Friedman's conclusions. Consequently, the issue of al-Faruqi's credibility for Dawn is minimal. I agree generally, but go further to suggest that the issue is of little consequence because the sources show that he did not qualify Husayn's demands for territory significantly and that British officials in Cairo were already aware that the Arabs would accept foreign advice and protection of their newly liberated regions; the key was great power recognition of that independence. Where al-Faruqi modified Husayn's demands was in his apparent acceptance of French advisors for Syria and Palestine, whose independence would be recognized; Husayn insisted on British tutelage only. But this concession in talks with Mark Sykes came after the 24 October letter from McMahon to Husayn had been sent, not before as Friedman implies. See my discussion below.

12. Friedman and Vereté stand alone in claiming that the "northwest" areas which were not "purely Arab" included Palestine. Friedman lists Vereté's article in his bibliography but not in his footnotes. The question of influence remains moot, but it must be noted that on the crucial question of Palestine and Friedman's misuse of McMahon's letters; Vereté provides full citations. The reasons for Friedman's claim, one of his key inventions, will be discussed below.

Vereté ("The Balfour Declaration," pp. 63 and 79-80, note no. 2) states that Palestine was reserved because of French interests, as does Friedman. The evidence he gives in his note, quoting McMahon's reference to Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, contradicts that contention. He is clearly confused by references to an Arabia that contained Syria and Palestine along with the Arabian peninsula. He concludes, against the evidence, that McMahon's "northwest" regions included Palestine because it was northwest of the Arabian peninsula, even though that designation was quite distinct from "Arabia" he himself had noted, and even though he quotes McMahon as indicating "the northern coast of Syria," quite a different matter than the Arabian peninsula.

All other studies assume, rightly, that these areas meant those specifically referred to by McMahon, namely "the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta [i.e., southeast Anatolia] and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo . . ." (Antonius, p. 419, McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915). As Kedourie notes, the argument that the word "district" denoted here *wilaya* as an administrative province, meaning that the Sanjak of Jerusalem was in the vilayet (*wilaya*) of Damascus, is untenable (AAL, pp. 101-2).

13. *QP*, p. 328; AAL, pp. 189-91, 282-84. Antonius put forward his claim in *The Arab Awakening*, p. 268. Kedourie, p. 284, dismisses it as "worthless." He returns to this subject in "The Chatham House Version" (*The Chatham House Version*, p. 375), in which he

scorns British officials who believed that the Arabs had been promised Palestine and argues that Husayn had been fully informed of the Balfour Declaration by Hogarth.

14. Friedman refers to FO 371/2486/34982 as his source. The memorandum can also be found in the Arab Bureau files, FO 882/13.

15. Sykes' letters are the following: 1. Telegram 707 sent to FO for DMO, no. 19, 20 November 1915. 2. Sykes, Cairo, to Cox, Mesopotamia, 22 November 1915. Both can be found in the Arab Bureau files, FO 882/13, pp. 437-43.

Kedourie discusses both the Clayton memorandum and al-Faruqi's meeting with Sykes in AAL. His treatment is contradictory. First he quotes accurately the relevant portion of Clayton's memorandum regarding al-Faruqi's references to Palestine and Mesopotamia (p. 80), but argues that the latter's views "are neither clear nor definite." Then, when referring to the meeting with Sykes, he states (p. 83) that al-Faruqi was speaking "quite a different language" and claimed all of Palestine and Syria. Although Kedourie strives to undermine the idea that Arabs showed interest in these territories, he does present the textual evidence in these cases, unlike Friedman.

16. In *QP*, pp. 83-85, Friedman discusses the al-Faruqi-Sykes talks of mid-November 1915 before turning to McMahon's letter of 24 October. He then analyzes McMahon's territorial reservations expressed in the letter in light of those talks which occurred two weeks later.

17. McMahon's telegram, along with a copy of his letter to Sharif Husayn, can be found in FO 371/2486/34982, 26 October 1915. The relevant portions are quoted accurately in Kedourie, AAL, pp. 98-99. It is worth noting that this dispatch is quoted without deletions in the relevant volume of *The Rise of Israel* edited by Friedman: vol. 6, *British-Zionist Relations, 1914-1917* (New York: Garland Press, 1987), document no. 35, pp. 121-24. For Vereté, see note no. 12. 18. AAL, pp. 190-91. The Hogarth memorandum was published in full in Cmd. 5964, *Statements made on behalf of His Majesty's Government during the year 1918 in regard to the future Status of certain parts of the Ottoman Empire, 1939*, Accounts and Papers, vol. XXVII, 1938-1939. The portions we are concerned with also exist in the Arab Bureau files, FO 882/13, and can be found in the relevant volume of *The Rise of Israel* edited by Friedman: vol. 9, *The Zionist Commission in Palestine, 1918* (New York: Garland Press, 1987), document no. 47, pp. 122-23.

19. As observed in note no. 13, Antonius argues (*Arab Awakening*, p. 268) that Hogarth's presentation of the Balfour Declaration to Husayn was a "fundamental departure" from the document's reference to the "civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish population." Kedourie disputes this (AAL, pp. 282-84), arguing that the Hogarth message was "no more than a reiteration of the Balfour Declaration . . ." and that Antonius's analysis was "worthless." Clearly the Hogarth version with its reference to the economic and political freedom of the Arab population, approved by the British government in order to deceive Husayn and reassure him, was not a reiteration of the Balfour Declaration. Kedourie's unfortunate reference applies more to his own analysis than to that of Antonius.

20. Weizmann's conversation with Faysal can be found in the Arab Bureau files, FO 882/14. His resentment at being unable to speak openly about the intention to create a Jewish state in Palestine, in order to allay Arab suspicions, and at being attacked by Jews as "being so moderate" appears in FO 608/100/174594, a record of the "Fifth Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Palestine held at the residence of the Right Honorable Herbert Samuel," 10 May 1919, p. 17.

21. In particular, the declaration's reference to "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people . . ." as opposed to the original Zionist draft which requested that Britain accept "the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people." Stein gives extensive treatment of these issues, including the texts of all drafts of the Balfour Declaration (*The Balfour Declaration*, p. 664). Although Stein rejects the notion of an Arab claim to Palestine, he does include the relevant material such as Hogarth's comment on withholding knowledge of a Jewish state from Husayn (p. 633) and Weizmann's statement to Faysal that no Jewish government was intended (p. 638).

22. Quoted from a conversation with Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India, 27 December 1918, in *AAI*, p. 222. A review of Faysal's contacts with the Zionists into the mid-1920s concludes that Faysal understood both the advantages (financial) and the dangers "of Zionism to the Arabs in general and to the Palestinian Arabs in particular" and that "he did not fully accept the Zionist programme, as most Zionists understood it except for the briefest of moments" (emphasis in original). Neil Caplan, "Faisal Ibn Husain and the Zionists: a Re-examination with Documents," *International History Review* 5, no. 4 (1983), pp. 561-614; the quote is on p. 569. Just when that brief moment was is not clear from the documents, but they indicate, during 1918-20, his assumption that all Palestinian rights would be protected and at times that Arab sovereignty from Damascus would prevail. Caplan notes the possibility that the Faysal letter to Frankfurter, discussed below, was actually written by T.E. Lawrence without Faysal's knowledge.

23. The texts of the Faysal-Weizmann agreement and the Faysal letter to Frankfurter can be found in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 18-22. This edition reverses the chronology of the Husayn-McMahon correspondence and the Sykes-Picot Agreement and implies that the discussions occurred simultaneously. The McMahon letter to Husayn of 24 October 1915 is placed after the May 1916 exchange of letters between Grey and Cambon. In general, the Laqueur-Rubin treatment of World War I omits a great deal, and the editorial comments occasionally mislead. There are no docu-

ments included noting British or Anglo-French promises of independence to the Arabs.

Weizmann's own discussion of the Faysal-Frankfurter exchange, along with his account of the presentation of Zionist objectives at the peace conference, can be found in Barnett Litvinoff, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, vol. 1, series B, August 1898-July 1931 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1983), pp. 220-38. Litvinoff notes, p. 220, n. 7, regarding the Faysal-Weizmann agreement of January 1919, that "Subsequently, both because of his sense of betrayal at the Peace Conference and interpretations of statehood given to Zionist demands, [Faysal's] attitude wavered." This is correct, especially in its reference to the issue of statehood, but Faysal repudiated the agreement at the insistence of the Syrian National Congress, rather than simply wavering in his attitude.

The issue of Arab "transfer," espoused particularly by Israel Zangwill, is discussed in Chaim Simons, *International Proposals to Transfer Arabs from Palestine, 1895-1947: A Historical Survey* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 34-46. The difficulties they created for Weizmann who saw such public proposals for forced emigration as dangerous appear in FO 608/100, 174594, cited in note no. 20.

24. The essay in question is by Martin Kramer, "Ambition's Discontent: The Demise of George Antonius," in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, Uriel Dann, ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 405-16; the quote is on p. 405. Kramer's view of Antonius is at best patronizing, at worst openly contemptuous in the best Kedouriean mode. See especially his review of Derek Hopwood, ed., *Studies in Arab History: The Antonius Lectures, 1978-87* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), in *Middle East Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1992), pp. 592-95, in which he suggests that Antonius was duplicitous because of representations made by others, responsibility for which Kramer strives to attribute to him without evidence. Albert Hourani's assessment of Antonius and *The Arab Awakening* in the book Kramer reviews, pp. 21-40, is more balanced and scholarly.

Kramer's eagerness to vilify Antonius recalls Rashid Khalidi's judgment that with respect to Islam and Arab nationalism, there "is a tendency to reduce ideology to the pettiest of personal motivations on the part of its formulators," leading Sylvia Haim as well as Kedourie to introduce "a tone of contempt for personal failings described in detail [which are] then closely linked to the ideas of these individuals" ("Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 [December 1991], p. 1370). In other words, to impugn the worth of individuals is to impugn the ideas/movements they espouse and to implicitly validate what they oppose, an ideological stance itself.