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Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British by
Roberto Mazza (Review)

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With few exceptions, they belong to Istanbul's voluble (Turcophone) literati or to European travelers—that is, to observers from relatively affluent and privileged social circles. A very helpful list at the beginning of the book identifies most of these primary sources, but throughout much of the text the reader hears little about their social prejudices related to class, origin, and education. A more self-conscious handling of these prickly and opinionated witnesses—who, by turns, were fond of speaking on behalf of the entire city or passing judgment on it—would have further corrected for the eagerness of chroniclers and travelers to fasten on eye-popping and spectacular reports. As a consequence, the book is susceptible to distortions of perspective. Following the primary sources, one section presents Istanbul in somewhat lurid shades as “a violent city where life was precarious and death lurked just around the corner,” most evidently in the earthquakes, storms, fires, and riots, which were the standard fare of chronicles and travelogues (p. 72). Receiving far less space are the microbes, rudimentary medical care, and unsanitary living conditions that routinely claimed far more lives. In the dramatic scenes that contemporaries favored, and that the book delights in repeating, the pedestrian realities of markets and backstreets, which were more representative of everyday social experience, tend to recede into the background.

The very wealth of episodic detail that the authors marshal from their sources tends to mask underlying social trends. Only Chapter 8, dealing with the disruptions unleashed by modernity in the 19th century, confines itself to a specific period with its own historical characteristics. In contrast, early modern social transformations, which were no less significant in their own right, receive spotty coverage. To take two examples: the state's concern with sartorial laws and the popularity of new consumer goods like tobacco (among other early modern controversies) appear without much probing of their timing or origin. The unwary reader can too easily get the impression of a “traditional” society prone to sudden convulsions and disturbances that came and went according to their own mysterious logic.

These historiographical lapses are dismaying because the book contains important observations and helps to deflate pernicious stereotypes about Ottoman society. It shows how Muslims and non-Muslims partook of the same urban culture as their neighbors and had more or less the same tastes and habits. Countering one of the most enduring stereotypes about Ottoman society, it emphasizes the visibility of women, Muslim and non-Muslim, who ventured regularly into public space. At other moments, the narrative slyly underlines the futility of many economic and religious regulations promulgated by the state, even in the capital itself.

Readers of this book will come away with a tour of Ottoman Istanbul that is interesting, far ranging, and full of arresting detail. But the very primary materials that furnish all this charm and immediacy can, when allowed to speak too freely and directly, inadvertently obscure the social history of the city over the long term. In spite of their success and thoroughness in gathering such an impressive body of firsthand evidence, the authors never manage to address key questions about methodology, organization, and interpretation that loom throughout their study.

ROBERTO MAZZA, *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009). Pp. 264. \$92.50 cloth.

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In recent years, scholars have periodized the history of modern Jerusalem and treated separately the years of modern reforms during the 19th century, the end of Ottoman rule in Jerusalem during World War I, life during the war, and the onset of British rule in December

1917. Roberto Mazza's *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* moves this literature forward in important directions by examining the history of modern Jerusalem as whole from the period of late Ottoman rule to the British occupation.

Mazza's work deals with three topics: the transition from Ottoman to British administration in Jerusalem, the experience of Jerusalem's residents during World War I, and the question of sources and historiography. Many works have devoted attention to Jerusalem either in the late Ottoman or in the British period, but Mazza's focus on the transition from Ottoman to British rule as a distinct phase of history is unique. His attention to the experience of World War I in Jerusalem contributes to a growing body of literature on the difficulties that residents of the city faced during these years. Mazza's discussion of sources and historiography has two related goals: first, to expand the use of Western sources in languages not traditionally accessed by scholars working on Jerusalem, such as French, Italian, and Spanish; and second, to include the production of narratives about Jerusalem in languages other than English, Arabic, and Hebrew, so as to allow for greater communication between scholars of different linguistic backgrounds. His interest in drawing upon a broader field of Western sources is vindicated by his impressive use of Western consular records and rarely used European memoirs and diaries, which allow him to provide interesting vignettes on Jerusalem's administration in the late Ottoman period or the difficulties the city's residents experienced during the years of World War I. Although these sources in European languages, such as French, Italian, and Spanish, contribute to our understanding of the period under study, Mazza's treatment of various topics, primarily the fate of Jerusalem's residents during World War I, could at times benefit from personal and intimate accounts by local residents and officials, which were written in Arabic, Ottoman-Turkish, Hebrew, as well as the various European languages of Jerusalem's Jewish population.

Chapter 1, "Modernising Jerusalem: Administration and Population," opens with a discussion of the modern reforms enacted during the 19th century. Although Mazza constructs a narrative familiar to most students of Jerusalem's modern history, he introduces non-English European sources that animate his account. For example, he uses Italian diplomatic records to explore a dispute over taxes in 1911 between the Italian hospital in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Administrative Council (*Meclis-i Idare*), providing a valuable example of how Ottoman institutions functioned at this time. In this chapter he also provides careful demographic calculations of Jerusalem's varied ethnic and religious populations.

The second chapter, "Christianity at War," explores the position of religious institutions in the city during the war years. One interesting example Mazza unveils is the case of the Catholic Custodia Terrae Sanctae (Custody of the Holy Land), the Franciscan order that had the responsibility of enforcing the Status Quo agreement meant to manage the religious sites in the Holy Land. Through memoirs belonging to two of its highest authorities (*custos*) that cover the years from 1914 to 1924, Mazza sheds light on how Christian institutions negotiated their relations with Jerusalem's Ottoman authorities during the war, as they faced seizure of goods and provisions as well as the occupation of religious buildings. The brief discussion of the growing alliance between Arab Christians and Muslims after World War I to confront Zionism raises methodological questions such as how a study of late Ottoman Jerusalem is related to the larger regional (i.e., Palestinian) and imperial (i.e., Ottoman) contexts: To what extent did the shifting nature of identity found throughout the empire in the years before World War I contribute to an emerging alliance between Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem after the war? And to what extent did these new forms of identity exist beyond Jerusalem, toward including all of Palestine?

Chapter 3, "Foreigners in Jerusalem," examines Jerusalem's foreign residents, such as consular agents, before World War I. The author's use of the memoir of the Spanish consul Conde de Ballobar (1913–19), who intermingled with the city's political elite and Arab notables and

lived in a “microcosm which reflected the larger context of the war in the Middle East” (p. 107), furthers our understanding of life in late Ottoman Jerusalem and the war years. Mazza’s effort here is consistent with that of Salim Tamari, who has edited and translated the memoirs of two other Jerusalem contemporaries, Ihsan Turjman (*Years of the Locust: A Soldier’s Diary and the Erasure of Palestine’s Ottoman Past* [New York: Routledge, 2011]) and Wasif Jawhariyyeh (*al-quds al-’uthmaniyya fi al-mudhakkirat al-Jawhariyya*, vol. I, ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar [Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2003]).

The overall impact of the war on the city is discussed in Chapter 4, “The War and the British Conquest of Jerusalem.” This chapter follows the increasing attention devoted to Jerusalemites’ experience of the war, the Ottoman mobilization for war, and the impressions Jerusalem residents had of British occupation. Readers might desire a deeper exploration of how Jerusalemites faced the hardships of the war, which can only be culled from the various memoirs, dairies, and other sources of local Jerusalem residents and institutions that the few scholars (e.g., Tamari and Abigail Jacobson) who have written about this period have used. Rather, the chapter focuses heavily on the still important discussion of how Britain initiated a propaganda campaign through the press to infuse a narrative that depicted a “Crusading spirit” (p. 143) to justify occupying Jerusalem and Palestine, helping to boost the morale of a war-weary British public and military.

The focus of Chapter 5, “British Military Rule 1917–1920 and the case of the Nebi Musa Riots,” addresses the transition of the British administration in Jerusalem from military to civilian rule. The author first looks closely at the career of Ronald Storrs, Jerusalem’s military governor (1917–20) and civil governor (1920–26), who despite the absence of a proper study of his tenure in Jerusalem had a “huge impact on setting the character of modern Jerusalem” (p. 159). For example, Mazza shows how Storrs’ founding of the Pro-Jerusalem Society in 1918 allowed the governor to preserve Jerusalem through his own “British and Victorian ideals” and maintain its “‘celestial’ character” (p. 162), a sentiment manifested in his removal of the Clock Tower built by the Ottomans in 1902 above the Jaffa Gate, which he saw as an “alien element” (p. 164). The author closely examines the riots that erupted at the Islamic Nabi Musa (Prophet Moses) festival in April 1920 in Jerusalem, which convinced British authorities that a civil regime more sympathetic to enacting the Balfour Declaration and the goals of Zionism needed to replace what appeared to be a military administration hostile to Zionism. Based on my own study on this topic, I would dispute the author’s claim that the two groups—Arabs and Jews—were organized and the riots planned (p. 174); rather, the riots seem to have been far more spontaneous in nature, born of the heightened political tensions that characterized Palestine in the months leading up to the conflagration.

Overall, Roberto Mazza’s *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* provides students of the modern Middle East, Palestine, and Jerusalem a cogent and rich discussion of a unique moment in Jerusalem’s history, as it shifted from Ottoman to British rule, bringing together sources that will inspire other researchers to investigate further. He should be commended for undertaking such thorough research to complete this study. The high price of the book, however, may make it prohibitive to adopt in the classroom.

URI RAM, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics (New York: Routledge, 2011), Pp. 172. \$130.00 cloth.

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