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“France and the Holy Land at the twilight of the Eastern Question ”

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Title : «France and the Holy Land at the twilight of the Eastern Question »

Throughout the 19th century, the Eastern Question, involved in various manners, the Great European Powers as well as states in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, or local community actors, inside or around the European and Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman empire. While they were competing each other in order to promote their own political and economic agendas, cultural supremacy represented a parallel expression and stake of these antagonisms. Jerusalem and the region of Ottoman Palestine, represented a hub in these more or less symbolic rivalries, including the race for the control of 'sacred topography'. Cultural diplomacy¹ was one of the facets and mechanisms of this process.

For France and Third Republic's governments, Catholicism was the core of her cultural diplomacy at the Holy Land. This involved a multi-centered approach by various official actors, civil servants of the Foreign Ministry, diplomats in the consulates and semi-official actors, religious congregations or staff of educational establishments. Moreover, France along with Germany took also part in the renewed interest for the area, felt in Europe during the 19th century, and described by the Israeli geo-historian Yehoshua Ben Arie as 'rediscovery' and by the French historian Henry Laurens as the 'invention' of the Holy Land². This trend stirred also strong political interest, which resulted in the establishment of spheres of influence over Ottoman territories in the Middle-East.

Through the exploration of Quai d'Orsay's diplomatic archives, mainly consular correspondence, this paper aims at studying on the one hand, the way these antagonisms had been perceived by French diplomats on the eve and the aftermath of the Great War. On the other hand, it examines the way in which these rivalries had been instrumentalised by France's foreign policy in the Holy Land and seen through the lens of interconfessional, intra-confessional relations, within the religious and socioeconomic landscape of the Ottoman Palestine.

Perceptions of antagonisms among the different Christian communities

During Easter celebration of 1909, French consul in Jerusalem, was standing at the balcony of Crédit Lyonnais, and was staring at the convoy of pilgrims crossing the city and marching towards the Holy-Sepulchre³. This procession was as usually a colourful one, as each pilgrim was bearing the flag of his/her own country. As a matter of fact, pilgrims' presence in the urban space, acted as a tool, a process, or a ritual aiming to impress local population and assure hegemonic place within the sacred topography. In such a perspective, processions during Easter festivities, put in stage this asset of symbolic power of each country in the Holy Land. This is the reason why French diplomats deplore in 1910, the modest caravans of their fellow citizens strolling along the Via Dolorosa, compared to the more impressive ones of German or Austro-Hungarian faith-believers⁴. The battle of national flags wavering above cultural institutions, was another expression of the symbolical occupation/nationalisation of the urban space. On the eve of the First World War, in a period of exacerbated tensions between European Great Powers,

¹ For an integrated presentation of the concept and mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, see Joseph S. NYE, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge 2004), and Martina TOPIC, Siniša RODIN (eds), *Cultural diplomacy and cultural imperialism : European perspective(s)* (Frankfurt am Main 2012).

² Yehoshua BEN-ARIEH, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the nineteenth century* (Jerusalem 1979) and Henry LAURENS, *La question de Palestine. Tome premier 1799-1922. L'invention de la Terre Sainte* (Paris 1999).

³ *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (AMAE)* : « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, April 22th 1909, n°22.

⁴ *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (AMAE)*, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, April 8th 1910, n°13.

the Salesians monks of Torino, were trying in vain to persuade the founder of the Salesian orphanage in Nazareth, Athanase Prun de Nevers, to pass under the Italian protectorate⁵, flying the tricolour, green, white and red flag.

Building on the sacred space was another way of symbolical colonisation, bound to demonstrate power. During his visit to Jerusalem in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II bought a piece of land on Mount Zion from Sultan Abdul Hamid II. According to local tradition, it was on this spot, that Virgin Mary “felt asleep”, which gave the monastery its name, Abbey of Dormition. French consul in Jerusalem considered that this construction, situated near to one of the most venerated mosques of the city⁶, was an additional sign of Kaiser’s influence, within the ottoman court and contributed to consolidate German ascending position in the share of spheres of influence on the city’s sacred topography⁷. Thus, celebrating a mass at the German Church of Dormition, by French priests, at the aftermath of the Great War, it was perceived as a sign of installing the outcome of this conflict into the sacred space, and at the same time a way to impress local Christian and Muslim populations, restoring France’s reputation as the guardian of Catholicism in the Holy Land⁸.

The place occupied by officials at the occasion of religious ceremonies was both an issue of concern for diplomats and the display of an hierarchical system shaped throughout the Capitulations tradition. Countries such as France, favoured by an ancient heritage⁹ were seeking to maintain this status quo, whereas, more recent state actors such as Italy which considered themselves as disadvantaged or aggrieved by the established order, they were trying to create significant precedents for promoting their influence. For instance, in 1919, during the visit of the Italian cardinal Giustini to Jerusalem, Italy’s consul occupied the first rank in the welcome ceremony and the Custodia, was qualified as a ‘piedmontese congregation’¹⁰ to the great despair of French consul.

Another vector of ecclesiastic, religious diplomacy, was the number of missionaries present in the Holy Land. Their large number in Jerusalem under French protection reflected France’s attempts to boost its imperial interests in the region. Cardinal Gasparri confessed to Doucet, chargé d’affaires to the Vatican, that Italian diplomats were accusing him of being *too much French* because he wished to recruit several French priests for his diocese¹¹. The visits of high-ranked members of the clergy coming from the main Great Powers involved in the battle for cultural hegemony, was another practice in order to signify its own prominence. During the year 1919, cardinal Giustini succeeded his English counterpart and he was followed by French cardinal Dubois¹², whose journey was scheduled as to coincide with Christmas, giving him the opportunity to celebrate Christmas mass in the Church of Nativity at Bethlem¹³.

The control of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, was also of major concern for European Great Powers considering themselves as representing the interests of Catholicism in the Holy Land. When Luigi Barlassina, was appointed patriarch in 1920, he challenged French supremacy in the protection of catholic Christians¹⁴. One of his predecessors in 1913, Filippo

⁵AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, May 31th 1909.

⁶ The mosque of the Cenacle, validated by an imperial firman at the aftermath of Wilhelm II’s journey to the Holy Land.

⁷ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, August 21th 1909.

⁸ AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, Durieux to Georges Picot, March 22th 1919.

⁹ The French reasserted themselves as administrators of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, a claim that France had confirmed in the context of the 1740 renewal of the capitulations, combined with a romantic nostalgia for the medieval crusades.

¹⁰ AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, Rome, October 29th 1919, n°291.

¹¹ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Doucet to Millerand, Rome, May 22th 1920.

¹² AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, Berne, September 18th 1919.

¹³ AMAE, Levant/118, Gouraud to French Foreign Affairs Ministry, Beyrouth, December 2nd 1919, n°1582.

¹⁴ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Gouraud, Beyrouth, April 24th 1920, n°894.

Camassei, had carried out the same policy of autonomisation vis-à-vis of French tutelage. Such a policy gained also sympathy among Arab Christians who were making up the majority of catholic Christians in the Holy Land. As French consul in Jerusalem complained in 1913, *they accept French protectorate when it is about to defend them against local (ottoman) governments interference (...) but they do not accept any control on behalf of the French consul*¹⁵.

In Palestine, French influence upon Christian Roman Catholics declined during the Great War. Italian government tried to benefit from the circumstances in order to assure the effective protection of Christians in this region¹⁶. When the war broke out in summer 1914, the Ottomans ordered French Catholic clergymen to leave. As foreign consuls left, catholic interests were overseen by neutral Spain. At the same time, the departure of French missionaries from Jerusalem, brought German and Austrian Catholics suddenly in charge of institutions held till then by French. That's why, at the end of the war, French ambassador to Rome, Camille Barrère, suggested to send French missionaries¹⁷ in order to strengthen France's position in situ.

This position was also defied by the Franciscan Custodia di Terra Santa. In an eloquent manner, consul Doumergue, talked about what he perceived as the *gallophobia*¹⁸ of the new custod, Sefarino Cimino, in May 1914. The Franciscans sought to retain their monopoly over Catholic schools in Jerusalem but other groups soon entered. Supported by France, Fathers of Sion, Dominicans, Assumptionists, Trappists, Benedictines, Carmelites and Lazaristes established their own schools. After 1905, French diplomats and clergymen, have to deal both with the opposition of Italian Franciscans who were in charge of the Custodia and on the other hand, with the impact of the law of separation between the State and the Church, affecting France's image among local Christian communities. As Legrand, French chargé d'affaires in Rome was writing to his ministry in 1905, French influence in the Holy Land was affected both because of the rivalry on behalf of the Italian government, the Italian religious orders and because of the anticlerical policy adopted by French Parliament¹⁹. Even if anticlericalism advocated by several third republican politicians was not to export, according to Gambetta's famous saying, echoes of internal politics, were reaching Holy Land via the spread of newspapers and undermined local Christians faith in France's capacity to assume its role as administrator of the Holy sites in Jerusalem²⁰.

Another event which rocked France's position in the Ottoman Palestine, was the Young Turk revolution of 1908. This event led to a radical upheaval in the dynamics of power and the organisation of socio-political life within the empire. One of the main aims of this new regime, was to abolish the Capitulations system, a semi-colonisation status in its 19th century form. Young-Turks wished to put an end to the interference of foreign states to the contacts with their own subjects. Thus, both the status of the Latin patriarchate of Jerusalem and France's role as administrator of the catholic sites of the Holy Land, had to be questioned. As a result of these new socio-political dynamics, France had to defend herself against both the attacks of her European rivals contesting its traditional place and the new vision of conducting ottoman affairs²¹. Despite a series of attempts to reactivate Capitulations at the aftermath of the Great War, during the San Remo Conference, in April 1920, Prime Minister Francesco Nitti insisted on the end of advantages attributed to external state actors. Consequently, his stance was a decisive blow to France's role as a protector of catholic institutions and communities.

¹⁵ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, December 16th 1913, n°87.

¹⁶ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Madrid, December 16th 1914, n°518.

¹⁷ AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, Rome, February 28th 1918, n°90.

¹⁸ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », French consul to Doumergue, May 12th 1914.

¹⁹ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Rome, September 1st 1905, n°151.

²⁰ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, June 12th 1909, n°31.

²¹ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Therapia (Istanbul), September 19th 1911, n°448.

No matter how obvious the antagonist relations between the two Latin sisters had been, several French diplomats considered that Westminster's policy was more threatening for France's centuries-old influence in Palestine than the strategy of Quirinal. As evidence, they stated on the one hand, the propaganda of the protestant missions, disposing of considerable financial means. According to a report of French consul in 1912, in the domain of charity institutions, England outnumbered France, with 36 establishments to 22. On the other hand, there was also the damaging effect to people's psychology, by the neighbouring of Southern Palestine with Egypt, where the rule of England was perceived as a successful one²². However, Camille Barrère, France's ambassador to Rome, thought that French policy should rather back the candidature of Couturier, of English citizenship, to succeed to Camassei to the siege of the Latin Patriarchate, *rather than an Italian candidate who will be hostile to us*²³. This point of view was not shared by Henri Gouraud²⁴, delegate of the French Government in the Middle East, who after having declared that *British occupation diminished our influence in Palestine*, he suggested an Italian Patriarch at the place of an English one²⁵.

Apart from intra-catholic struggles of power, one of France's religious diplomacy main goals in the Holy Land, was to protect Roman catholic Christians from the encroachments on their heritage by orthodox Christians²⁶. At the echo of the Crimean War, French consuls had to intervene in the settlement of disputes stemming from challenging the status quo in the "sharing" of religious sites, notably inside the Holy Sepulchre. This site, one of the most visiting pilgrims, was an ideal place for assessing the "politics of possession"²⁷. The Holy Sepulchre, was a mosaic where conflictual claims of space possession had been crystallized throughout time, and where a rigid classification of access was codified. Consequently, the role of French consuls in Jerusalem, was to mediate disputes involving Christian Catholics and Christians belonging to other rites inside this building.

French diplomacy was also concerned by power relations inside the orthodox-christian community of byzantine rite. This community was mainly composed by Greek, Russian, Ottoman Greek-speaking and Ottoman Arab-speaking members. By the 19th century, this clergy was split between local Arab orthodox who occupied lower-level positions and a small group of Greek-speaking monks and priests who had authority in the church's upper levels. When the Arab Orthodox elements argued that they felt excluded from the administration and were prevented from taking part in the Patriarchate's decision making processes, contested the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. This competition was also joined by Russia who wished to assume leadership within this institution and promote its own interests in the Holy Land. Thus, the orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem of byzantine rite, became a place of antagonisms and ecclesiastic diplomacy, both among European Great Powers and local communities. In his report, Pierre Durieux, French delegate of the high commission of Jerusalem, commenting the removal of Damianos from the chair of the Greek-orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem, he concluded that it was the result of the combining action of Greek and British diplomacy. Greek policy was consisting in her will to replace Russia in its role of protector of Greek-orthodox populations in ottoman Palestine and British policy was trying to

²² AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, January 25th 1912, n°3.

²³ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Rome, December 6th 1919, n°2703.

²⁴ Gouraud's administration in Syria borrowed much from his time as a young man working under general Lyautey in Morocco, where colonial policy focused on control of the country through manipulation of tribes, Sufis, and the rural Berber populations. In Syria, this took the form of separate administrations for Druze and Alawite communities, with the aim of dividing their interests from those of urban nationalists.

²⁵ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Beyrouth, December 16th 1919, n°1655.

²⁶ AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, « Note sur le protectorat catholique de la France en Turquie », Avril 1919.

²⁷ Glenn W. BOWMAN, In dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n": The Politics of Possession in Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre in: History and Anthropology, XXII (3) (2011) 371-399.

emancipate from a Greek-speaking hierarchy the three Arab-speaking orthodox patriarchates of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch and promote its own interests in the respective regions²⁸. French consuls had also to iron out tensions rising between the Roman catholic and Armenian Christian community. It was the case when the Armenian patriarch did not authorise Franciscans of the Custodia to celebrate a mass for Pentecost to the monastery of Saint-Jacques, on May 1918²⁹.

Perceptions of inter-confessional relations

Besides the religious field, cultural diplomacy was also conducted in terms of educational policy, mainly in the subject of languages used for teaching. Barlassina, considered by French diplomats as *Italianissime*, sought to insert Italian as a compulsory language to the international school in Jerusalem, thus diminishing the importance of French language in the program. This could maybe explain Italian diplomatic mission interest in the issue of this school³⁰ observed the French consul in his correspondence with the Quai d'Orsay. Another case including France's perception of the linguistic stakes of the Eastern question in the Holy Land, was the rivalry between the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) and Hilsverein. AIU was perceived as both an institution promoting the idea of assimilation for Jewish people to the states where they were living and as a network for the spread of the French language. On the contrary, Hilsverein was perceived as a Zionism-oriented organisation and a vector for the promotion of German language and influence³¹. In such a sense, the election of Haim Nahum as the Ottoman Empire chief rabbi in 1909, was positively received by French diplomats. Nahoum effendi was viewed as favourable to the Entente and trying to counteract within the Jewish community and within the Zionist movement, the German influence, notably the influence of Hilfs Verein rival of the AIU³². At the same time, French consul in Jerusalem informs his ministry in Paris about a strike of teachers and pupils at the Zionist schools of Jerusalem and Jaffa, belonging to the German association Juden Hilfs-Verein, in order to remove German and replace it from Hebrew. He also underlines that these protesters have also inaugurated schools with French as second language³³.

Between the Young Turks revolution on 1908 and the Balfour Declaration on 1917, Ottoman Jewish subjects were in fact facing the following dilemma : Ottoman universalism or Hebraic nationalism. On the one hand, "Ottoman Jews sought to take part in the new political era, embracing the ideological principles of the revolution and seizing the tools of Ottoman citizenship. On the other hand, this period coincided with the community's progressive exposure to and reception of the ideas and institutions of European Zionism"³⁴. Alongside Zionism, Arab political consciousness grew also as a competing national project. Between the Sykes-Picot agreement on 1916 and the San Remo resolution four years later, French diplomacy had to revisit its guidelines to deal both with the rise of Zionism and the rise of Arab nationalism³⁵. As Abigail Jacobson illustrates in her book, *From empire to empire : Jerusalem*

²⁸ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Durieux to Georges Picot, Jerusalem, November 27th 1918.

²⁹ AMAE, Palestine/49CPCOM, Cairo, May 27th 1918, n°283.

³⁰ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Durieux to Pichon, Jerusalem, December 28th 1918.

³¹ André KASPI (dir.), *Histoire de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 à nos jours* (Paris, 2010).

³² AMAE, « Religion israélite ; protectorat religieux de la France en Orient », Paris, May 28th 1920.

³³ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem 3 mars 1914, n°16.

³⁴ Michelle Ursula CAMPOS, *Ottoman brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in early twentieth-century Palestine* (Stanford California 2011) p.197.

³⁵ Like its Arab counterpart and the emergence of secular nationalisms in Europe, Zionism was inspired by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment principles of the social contract and citizenship. Moreover, Zionism

between Ottoman and British rule, traditional affiliations and alliances between groups changed following the transition, mainly because of what the non-Jewish inhabitants viewed as a pro-Zionist British policy. “Muslims and Christians, traditionally alien to each other because of a history of wars and conflicts in the Ottoman era, became allies against Zionism and the Balfour policy. Jews and Muslims, who historically maintained good relations, became alienated because of the changing political reality in Palestine”³⁶.

It was also this period that marked the transition between Ottoman and British rule in Palestine³⁷. During these years, the political status of Palestine was negotiated by the local inhabitants, the Great Powers, and also King Faysal. Britain, France, Germany and the USA all had stakes in Palestine and tried to promote their interests by various reports they submitted, by supporting local groups, and by their participation in the Peace Conference in Paris, as far as the victorious powers were concerned. For their part, the local groups, the various Arab nationalist associations, or the organisations of the Zionist movement, were struggling to achieve their own objectives. The third part of the equation was King Faysal, who even though he supported the establishment of Greater Syria, which would include Palestine, he also negotiated with various representatives of the Zionist movement in order to reach a Jewish-Arab agreement.

During the Great War, French consuls³⁸ observed the expansion of German influence, notably among local Muslim populations, due to Germany portraying herself as the sole protector of Islam and capable of giving back to the Ottoman empire all the territories it had previously lost. On the contrary, local Christian populations were praying for the victory of Allies.

However, at the aftermath of this conflict, it was British policy in this region that was perceived as highly antagonistic to French interests. According to French consuls in the Holy Land, England sought to a twin aim in the territories directly claimed by France : in Syria, a tight alliance with cherifian Muslims for their Panarabic project ; in Palestine a way to promote Zionist demands. French diplomats in their correspondence with the Quai d’Orsay³⁹, were referring to the opposition of local population in Palestine to Zionism, at the exception of the local Jewish community. Such an opposition seemed to them a good basis to explore for attaining a settlement of the Palestinian question, in the profit of French interests. During his visit, the cardinal Dubois had the occasion to discuss with several leaders of various political and confessional groups, such as the Armenians, Catholics and Muslims. According to his report, all of them were against the plans of English and Jews, *wishing that our traditional rights assure us the mandate in order to secure Palestine from the nationalist danger and spare separation with Syria*⁴⁰. On November 8th, 1919, a group of Jerusalem Christians and Muslims, sent a petition to the French consul, in order to protest for what they viewed as injustice committed against Palestinian Arabs. The members of this committee asked French high commissioner in Syria, not to hand over their country *to a nation whose history is tarnished by robberies, massacres, killings of prophets and apostles*⁴¹. Besides the Anti-Semitic

grew also as a response to escalating anti-Semitism in European society, such as the series of pogroms in Russia at the end of the 19th century.

³⁶ Abigail JACOBSON, *From empire to empire : Jerusalem between Ottoman and British rule* (Syracuse, N.Y. 2011) p.149.

³⁷ This period started during the First World War and was ended with the arrival of Sir Herbert Samuel in Jerusalem on June 1920, in order to implement the decision of San Remo conference assigning the mandate for Palestine to Great Britain.

³⁸ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », French consul in Jerusalem to Delcassé, August 31th 1914.

³⁹ AMAE, « Sionisme », Paris, February 24th 1920.

⁴⁰ AMAE, « Religion israélite ; protectorat religieux de la France en Orient », Telegram from Beyrouth, received by the Navy Minister January 4th 1920, n°1.

⁴¹ AMAE, “Sionisme”, French High Commissioner in Syria to Millerand, March 9th 1920.

assessments of such a discourse, this document reflects both the trend to organize mixed associations involving Christian and Muslim Ottoman Palestinians and the fact that France was perceived by their actors as a power willing to counteract British plans⁴².

According to the Office of Jewish Press in Anvers, the action of French authorities in Syria-Palestine, relies mainly on *Syrians and catholic Christians*. *Given that both of them are our own rivals, it is clear that France and Zionism do not share the same interests as England does. On top of that, France conducts in her colonies a policy of assimilation ; she does neither understand nor encourages local nationalism ; that's why if Galilea passes under French influence, we do not think that Jews would be satisfied with such an evolution*⁴³.

Apparently, the authors of such statements were not aware of the Sykes-Picot agreement signed in May 1916 and which established the spheres of influence between France and Great Britain in the Middle-East. France was to control Syria (which then included most of modern day North Lebanon) the northern part of Iraq and the southern Anatolian peninsula, while Britain got the rest of Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan and the western Arabian peninsula.

As for French diplomats, Palestine did not represent a major stake for Muslim leaders, neither from a political nor from a religious point of view. According to the French consul, this was the result of *the cosmopolitan aspect of its population where the Muslim element is one among various components (...) moreover, the affluence of tourists and pilgrims, initiates indigenous people to the European civilisation ; this is also one of the reasons of an assiduous attendance of catholic and protestant missions ; even if an awakening of fanaticism should take place, as it happens always and everywhere in the Orient, we should not worry much about it*⁴⁴.

Despite the essentialist assertions of French consuls, Arab leaders were strongly angered when they learned about the Balfour declaration, a British policy statement that endorsed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine⁴⁵. During the San Remo conference, held at Villa Devachan in April 1920⁴⁶. French delegates accepted the text presented by the British Prime Minister, which incorporated Balfour declaration, under the condition that the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine would bring no prejudice to the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. This point was particularly raised by French Prime Minister Alexander Millerand and the diplomat Philippe Berthelot⁴⁷. France's minister of foreign affairs

⁴² France had also financed the association called al-Muntada al-Adabi (the Literary Club), whose members were made up by the young Arab intelligentsia and which was calling for the unification of Palestine with Syria. . Its members adopted a violent anti-British and anti-Zionist line. See Abigail JACOBSON, *From empire to empire...*, *op.cit.*, p.154.

⁴³ AMAE, "Sionisme", Office de presse juif, Anvers, March 23th 1920.

⁴⁴ AMAE, « Etablissements religieux français en Orient », Jerusalem, November 30th 1909, n°65.

⁴⁵ In November 1917, British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour had sent a letter to baron Edmund de Rothschild, a member of a family of prominent financiers and leader in the Jewish community of Great Britain. The letter said that the British cabinet supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, as long as its creation did not infringe on the rights of the Arabs who already lived in the region. As Lorenzo Kamel states, the idea of a 'Jewish client state' in Palestine became increasingly established within British foreign policy after the Crimean War. Since the reformation, many Protestants considered Jews' conversion to Christianity and their physical restoration to the Holy Land as preliminary steps towards the Second Coming of the Messiah. If these beliefs were increasingly obsolete at the turning of the 20th century, they had been replaced by England's mission to educate the populations in the east, (the civilisation burden), a biblical perception of the present, historic claims of Jews on their ancient homeland, and geostrategic interests of the British Empire. Thus, according to Lorenzo Kamel, apart "from being a useful tool to accomplish biblical prophecies, Jews became thus more and more potential means for guaranteeing British routes and strategies". See Lorenzo KAMEL *Imperial perceptions of Palestine : British influence and power in late Ottoman times* (London 2015) p.10.

⁴⁶ It was attended by the four Principal allied powers of the First World War, who were represented by the prime ministers of Britain (David Lloyd George), France (Alexandre Millerand), Italy (Francesco Nitti) and by Japan's Ambassador Keishirō Matsui.

⁴⁷ AMAE, « Religion israélite ; protectorat religieux de la France en Orient », 'Notes du secrétaire prises au cours de la réunion tenue le 24 avril 1920 à la villa Devachan'.

addressing himself to the High Commissionaire in Beyrouth, reminded him that France had never accepted that Palestine becomes a Zionist state. According to him, the only point raised, it was about the installation and development of Jewish agricultural and industrial colonies, in some parts of the Palestinian territory, along with the respect of the civic rights of all inhabitants⁴⁸. At the end, France approved the Balfour declaration, and in exchange, Zionist movement, backed French colonization in Syria, portraying it as a civilizational mission⁴⁹.

Conclusion

Traditionally viewed as a country assuming the protection of the Christian-Catholic community in the Ottoman empire, France's role had been contested by both the Italian kingdom, the German or British Empire but also the Vatican, the Custodia and the Young-Turks regime. Moreover, conflicting confessional and political interests opposed her to the tsarist Russia, or imperial Great-Britain. Furthermore, French diplomats were interested in the relationships between the Ottoman administration and the non-Muslim communities, as well as in the tensions arising among the different Christian patriarchates in place. At the same time, the educational activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle compared to those of International Zionist Organisation in the lands of Ottoman Palestine, had been considered within parts of French public and diplomatic opinion as an expression of Franco-German competition. If Zionism was perceived as a German-friendly movement on the eve of the Great War, it was associated afterwards to British imperialist plans in the Holy Land and shaped France's policy till the final act of its disengagement at San Remo conference.

⁴⁸ AMAE, "Sionisme", Paris, May 7th 1920, French Foreign Office to French High Commissioner in Beyrouth.

⁴⁹ AMAE, "Sionisme", Jerusalem, November 18th 1919, Rais to Picot. As Gudrun Krämer highlights, the mandates system "was essentially colonial rule in new guise and was understood as such locally. The main concern for the European powers was to determine their overseas spheres of influence". See Gudrun Krämer, *A history of Palestine : from the Ottoman conquest to the founding of the state of Israel* (Princeton, N.J. 2008) p.164.

Abstract : «France and the Holy Land at the twilight of the Eastern Question »

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During the Eastern Question, the Great European Powers as well as local state or community actors, inside or around the European and Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman empire were competing each other in order to promote their own political, economic interests and cultural supremacy. Jerusalem and the region of Ottoman Palestine, represented a hub in these antagonisms, including the race for the control of 'sacred topography'. Traditionally viewed as a country assuming the protection of the Christian-Catholic community in the Ottoman empire, France's role had been contested by both the Italian kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Moreover, conflicting confessional and political interests opposed her to the tsarist Russia, or imperial Great-Britain. At the same time, the educational activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle compared to those of International Zionist Organisation in the lands of Ottoman Palestine, had been considered within parts of French public and diplomatic opinion as an expression of Franco-German competition. Furthermore, French diplomats were also interested in the relationships between Muslim and Jewish communities, as well as in the tensions arising among the different Christian patriarchates in place. Through the exploration of Quai d'Orsay's diplomatic archives and consular correspondence, this paper aims at studying the way intra-confessional and inter-confessional antagonisms had been perceived by French citizens between the military conflicts of 1912-1913 and the aftermath of the Great War.