

The Zionist View of History

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A close scrutiny of the Zionist view of history would not allow us to profess neutrality. Israel's statehood-its famous right to exist which the Palestinian Arabs are called upon to recognize is based on gigantic manipulation and obfuscation of historical facts. The Zionist enterprise that is the state of Israel possesses no legitimacy-historical, biblical or juridical –in the place where it was established. Political Zionism born barely a century ago with Theodor Herzl and his book Derjudenstaat, is both a perversion and a betrayal of religious and the spiritual mission of Judaism. Herzl's followers, ruthlessly exploited the "historical myth" and the "Biblical pretext" for the seizure of Palestine and the expulsion of its inhabitants. Asked about the legitimacy of the Zionist state, Golda Meir, the former Prime Minister of Israel dismissed the problem saying, "This country exists as a result of a promise made by God Himself. It would be ridiculous to ask for the recognition of its legitimacy."¹

Scientific historians refuse to accept such assertions. They argue that they are entitled to question whether this was really His intention when His Commands have been related to us often in a contradictory and unconvincing manner by the very people who claim to be the beneficiary of His will. It is about time when we analyze "the myth of historic rights" in addition to the "biblical myth".

For a rational examination of the Zionist view of history it is necessary to delimit rigorously the subject of our criticism, by defining and distinguishing between religious Zionism and political Zionism between Zionism and Judaism, and between the Israel of the Bible and the Zionist state of Israel.

Religious Zionism and Political Zionism

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Religious Zionism gave rise to a tradition of Jewish pilgrimage to the “holy land” and even the establishment of spiritual communities, especially during the persecutions by the ‘Most Catholic Sovereigns of Spain, after a long and happy coexistence of Arabs and Jews in that country which led some pious, men to go to Palestine in order to live in accordance to their faith. In the 19th century “the lovers of Zion” pursued the aims of creating in that land of Zion a spiritual centre from which Jewish faith and culture would spread.

One can observe at this juncture that this religious Zionism though it affected only small groups never encountered opposition from the Arabs. This spiritual Zionism was alien to any political programme for creating any dominion over Palestine. It thus never led to clashes between the Jewish communities and the Arab population, whether Muslim or Christian.

Political Zionism began with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), who advocated it from 1882 onwards, and gave it a systematic form in 1896 in his book on The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat), and began to apply it concretely with first Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897.

An analysis of the proceedings of this congress at Basle is most revealing particularly in the light of Herzl’s meticulously and candidly recorded Diaries.² Political Zionists sought fulfillment of their aims through mobilizing all Jews irrespective of national boundaries. The primary mobilizing force in favour of Zionism was the Christian European attitude of anti-Semitism. Herzl explains, “No great exertion will be necessary to stimulate the immigration movement. The anti-Semites are already taking care of this for us.”³ Indeed a prominent “Spiritual Zionist” – Ahad Ha’am – characterized Herzl’s Zionism as the product of anti-Semitism and its dependence on anti-Semitism for its existence.⁴ The Grand Duke of Baden told Herzl that “people regarded Zionism as a species of anti-Semitism”⁵ and Herzl accepted it without reservations.

Another means of mobilizing Jewish opinion was the appeal of Jews through certain Jewish notions, most notably that of the “Chosen People”. This notion was tied to the notion of the “Promised land” and the promise of “return”, despite the fact that the leading Zionists were either non-religious or downright agnostics. Moses Hess maintained, “every Jew has the making of a messiah, every Jewess that of a Mater Dolorosa.”⁶ Ahad Ha’am stated. “We feel ourselves to be the aristocracy of History.”⁷

Herzl declared. “Our race is more efficient in everything than most of other peoples of the earth.”⁸

Herzl gave preference to Palestine as the Promised Land because he wanted to make use of the “Lovers of Zion” tendency. He wanted to strengthen his political Zionist movement, and sought to rest it on the basis of a religious tradition in which he himself did not believe.

The most typical example of the clever use made of the confusion between the two kinds of Zionism appeared long after Herzl’s death, in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, wherein His Majesty’s government declared its support for a national home for the Jews in Palestine. The leader of Political Zionism manipulated this Declaration as signifying the creation of “a Jewish State” of Palestine in which the indigenous population would have no place.

Zionism and Judaism

The second confusion is the identification of Political Zionism with Judaism, that is utilizing religion to serve its political aims.

The fundamental principle of Zionism is that the Jewish People are a homeless nationality whose salvation can only be achieved through the establishment of a Jewish political state in Palestine. The fundamental principle of Judaism is that the Jewish people are essentially a religious community.⁹ Samuel Holdheim a proponent of Reform Judaism opines, “We do not grant that there is such a thing as a Christian state, and certainly we should not speak of a Jewish state....”¹⁰

There are at least two main traditions in Judaism: the priestly and the prophetic. The first is institutional and exclusive and its logical end is the theocratic state. The second is ethical and universal, and its glory has been to give religious impetus to the emancipation of mankind from tribalism to universal brotherhood.

Political Zionism is the revival in this modern age of primitive nationalism and the sectarianism of the priestly cult. Except for the dilution of the theocratic elements there is in the present-day Political Zionism the same combination of reactionary forces which the prophets fought against.

In 1878 Rabbi Hermann Adler, then the chief Rabbi in England, said¹¹

“Judaism has no political bearing whatever....Ever since the conquest of

Palestine by the Romans we have ceased to be a body politic. We are citizens of the country in which we dwell.”

In relation to this universalistic tradition in Judaism, Political Zionism constitutes a nationalistic and colonialist distortion which owes its bent not to Judaism but to European nationalism and colonialism of the 19th century. It makes use of a selective and narrow reading of the Bible in order to provide a disguise and camouflage for its political objectives.¹² At the time when Rabbi Hermann was attempting to dismantle the deliberate confusion between Zionism and Judaism, Ignaz Goldziher (1850-91) generally acknowledged as the scholar whose work to a great extent laid the foundations for the study in west of the history, culture and religion of Islam was writing his *Keleti Naplóm* (“My Oriental Diary”).¹³ The Oriental Diary is replete with a wealth of fascinating and often quite important details. The Oriental Diary is significant not only as a mirror of Goldziher’s interests, views and personality, but also as a document bearing on numerous aspects of the history of the Arab East in the later nineteenth century.¹⁴ While on tour of different cities of the near East Goldziher visited Jerusalem. Jerusalem was naturally a high emotional experience for Goldziher. However, he soon concludes that the Holy City has been turned into a practically pagan centre of absurd formalism and despiritualised ritual.¹⁵ According to Goldziher, “If one wants to be sobered up in matters of religion, let one but come to Jerusalem.”¹⁶ Goldziher rendered a seminal contribution by his theories on ancient Israelite mythology.¹⁷ However, at the time when Goldziher was writing his scholarly discourses, Zionist ideologues were already employing historical and pseudo-Biblical myths for narrow political purposes in the service of Zionism. Today in the state of Israel, the Rabbinate of the right wing religious parties tries to maintain the “selective” and “sectarian” reading of the Bible, for new political ends and succeeds in imposing its attitude upon the state.

To unravel the deadly confusion between religious Zionism and political Zionism, between Judaism and Zionism, further rigorous analysis of the mythology on which it is based-historical myths and pseudo-Biblical ones, is an imperative.

The Myth of “Historic Rights”

The Zionist organization at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 declared in respect of Palestine: “This land is the historic home of the Jews”.¹⁸

The proclamation of the State of Israel on 14th May, 1948 asserted that it was “by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people” that state was being established in Palestine.¹⁹

The theme of “historic rights” is very handy for Zionists along with that of the “promised land”, which is supposed to confer on the Israelis a genuine “divine right” of ownership and domination over Palestine.²⁰

The old Testament accounts of events before the 10th century B.C. are not confirmed by the annals of the West Asian people or in archaeological remains. Apart from the Bible there is “no explicit reference to the Hebrew patriarch the period spent in Egypt or the conquest of Canaan. It is moreover, doubtful whether any further light will be shed on this question by new texts”²¹ The history of the Hebrews does not appear at any time to have been distinct from the great Mesopotamian, Hittite or Egyptian empires.

This region, placed at the heart of the “Fertile Crescent”, which extends from the Nile to the Euphrates, is one through which the most diverse groups of human beings have passed on their migrations. When nomads, or pastoral peoples who were on their way to adopting a settled way of life coming from Mesopotamia, arrived in Canaan at the beginning of the Second Millennium B.C., in the early Bronze Age, they found inhabitants, who had made it their home long before them—the Canaanites, who already possessed an urban civilization and were to acquire, at the end of the second millennium, the use of iron and the practice of alphabetic writing.²² The “Hebrews”, contrary to the traditional belief of the Bible, did not form a distinct ethnic group before the nomads entered Canaan. They were a confederation based on a variety of ethnic groups, forming an element in the great nomadic migrations.²³

The earliest mention of the name “Israel” appears on a stele of about 1225 B.C., commemorating the triumphs of Pharaoh Merneptah. There it is said, without giving any details that when he seized towns in Palestine he also destroyed “Israel”. “Israel has been destroyed, its race exists no more.” Nothing else is said about Israel in this text.²⁴ Moreover, “it could not have meant the whole of Israel, that is, the twelve tribes, because “all Israel” had not been constituted at that time. It must have meant Israel in a much narrow sense”²⁵.

Furthermore, four hundred clay tablets which were discovered, from 1887 onward, at Tel-el-Amarna, the capital created by Pharaoh Amenophis IV (Akhneton, 1375-1358), give us records which include the correspondence between the Pharaoh and the vassal princes of Palestine and Syria. They contain no hint of "Israel", but provide interesting information about the city-states of Canaan and their rivalries.²⁶

Two possible conclusions emerge from the slender marks left by history. First it is not possible to claim Israel, as an "historic right", the right of the first occupier. Along with the Aramaic wave the Hebrews found there the "indigenous" Canaanites, the Hittites (around Hebron, which they founded), the Ammonites (around Amman), the Moabites (to the east of the Dead Sea) and the Edomites (in the south-east). At the same time there were arriving from the Aegean sea another people, the Philistines, who installed themselves between Mount Carmel and the desert. Those who are nowadays called "Palestinians"²⁷ are thus not descended from the Semitic tribes alone. The Palestinians are a mixed people descended from the indigenous Canaanites who lived in Palestine five thousand years ago, from the Philistines who gave the country its name Palestine, and also from the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and even Turks who successively occupied the country, following the Babylonians, the Hittites and the Egyptians. The "first occupiers" are these "Philistines", who have inhabited the country since the dawn of history.

The second observation that follows from a study of the history of Palestine is that the Hebrews (the apiru) when they arrived in Palestine were simply one set of immigrants amongst others.

Political Zionism engages in a systematic manipulation and misrepresentation of facts when in Israeli school books, as in propaganda for the outside world, it mentions only those periods when the Hebrews played a significant role namely:

1. The invasion of the land of Canaan
2. The Kingdom of David and Solomon lasting less than 80 years
3. the Babylonian exile and the return
4. Insurrections against Romans in A.D. 66-70 and A.D. 132. After this last insurrection, the Jews were either killed or dispersed.²⁸

From that time until the 20th century, when Zionism was able under the British mandate to organize a massive Jewish emigration to Palestine, very few Jews inhabited the country. For nineteen centuries the Jews had almost ceased to live in Palestine. Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish pilgrim who visited the Holy Land about A.D. 1170-1171, found only 1,440 Jews in all Palestine; and Nahman Gerondi, in A.D.1267, found only two Jewish families in Jerusalem.²⁹ The King Crane commission, appointed at the suggestion of President Woodrow Wilson, summed up the legal position by declaring that “the initial claim, often submitted by Zionist representatives, that they have a ‘right’ to Palestine based on occupation of two thousand years ago, can hardly be seriously considered.”³⁰

The Hebrew or Israelite occupation of Palestine was a Biblical episode which came to an end centuries ago, as was the case with other invasions. It is evident that the Zionist claim of an ‘historic right’ to Palestine was based on false historical premises. It was a pseudo-legal disguise designed to give a colour of right to the Zionist plan to usurp Palestine from its original inhabitants.

To sum up the discussion, a Statement of Principle of the American Council for Judaism of August 31, 1943 in the name of Lessing J. Rosenwald may be quoted:³¹

We oppose the effort to establish a national Jewish state in Palestine or anywhere else as a philosophy of defeatism, and one which does not offer a practical solution of the Jewish problem. We dissent from all these related doctrines that stress the racialism, the nationalism and the theoretical homelessness of Jews. We oppose such doctrines as inimical to the welfare of the Jews in Palestine, in America, or wherever Jews may dwell. We believed that the intrusion of Jewish national statehood has been a deterrent in Palestine’s ability to play an even greater role in offering a haven for the oppressed, and that without the insistence upon such a statehood, Palestine would today be harboring more refugees from Nazi terror.

This same voice was drowned in the Zionist upheaval nurtured by the British during its ‘mandate’ in Palestine, and at its termination in 1948, and by the constant support, political and financial, that the USA has offered Israel thereafter. Zionism offers a vivid illustration of how a myth can, first, be converted into acceptable history, and then, with powerful ‘Gentile’

support, turned into a nightmare of reality.

Notes and References

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