

**Archeology and Mission:
The British Presence in Nineteenth-Century Jerusalem**

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In 1834, James Cartwright, secretary of the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, composed a pamphlet entitled “The Hebrew Church in Jerusalem,” in which he discussed the impetus for his organization’s activities in Palestine. “It is well known,” he explained, “that for ages various branches of the Christian Church have had their convents and their places of worship in Jerusalem. The Greek, the Roman Catholic, the Armenian, can each find brethren to receive him, and a house of prayer in which to worship. In Jerusalem also the Turk has his Mosque and the Jew his Synagogue. The pure Christianity of the Reformation alone appears as a stranger.”¹

This brand of evangelical Protestantism, which viewed itself as competing primarily with “degenerate” forms of Christianity like Catholicism, represented the driving force behind British activity in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem, for much of the nineteenth century. It manifested itself especially in two fields: missionary activity and archeological pursuits. The British who poured into Palestine during the nineteenth century, undertaking missionary work, archeological research, or both, took as their primary frame of reference a Protestant evangelical theology that situated itself in direct opposition to the ritualistic practices and hierarchical organization of Catholicism and, by extension, the Eastern Christian churches.

This theological approach led the British to focus their energies on the small local populations of Christians and Jews, to the almost total exclusion of the Muslim community. It also determined a pattern of cooperation with other Western powers who shared an evangelical Protestant outlook, especially America and Germany, and the development of hostile relations with Catholic and Orthodox powers, notably France and Russia. It led archeologists to focus on Palestine’s biblical past, and to view its Ottoman and Muslim history as a minor and temporary aberrance not worthy of serious consideration.

¹ Cited in Yaron Perry, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Palestine* (London: Cass, 2003), 30

And finally, it allowed for the emergence of the view that Britain's "pure" Christianity and understanding of the true significance of the "Holy Land" could legitimize a political claim to Palestine.

Early British missions in Palestine

British missions to the "Holy Land" trailed French and Russian mission activity by many decades. By the mid-nineteenth century, French and Russian Catholic and Orthodox monasteries, convents, schools and hospices had been prominent in Palestine for nearly a hundred years. France had acquired a "protector" status over the Catholics of the Ottoman empire in the "capitulations" of 1740, after which French Catholic missionary activity expanded. In 1744, Russia received a similar protectorate over the empire's Orthodox Christian subjects, and began to promote Russian Orthodox activity in Palestine. The European Catholic presence in Palestine was solidified with the restoration, in 1847, of the Latin Catholic patriarchate in Jerusalem and the French monastery on Mount Carmel. In both the French and the Russian cases, these Christian missions in Palestine were viewed as representative of their countries' political power in the Ottoman empire, and the French and Russian governments both used concern for mission institutions as a pretext for interference in Ottoman political affairs.

British missions in Palestine, by contrast, did not begin to appear until the mid-nineteenth century, and were comprised mainly of evangelical Protestants who stood some way outside the structures of church and state power in the metropole.² The first British missionary group to send representatives to Palestine was the Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799 by a group of evangelical members of the Church of England known as the "Clapham Sect," after the neighborhood where many of its members resided. The members of the CMS, led by the Reverend Josiah Pratt, concerned themselves not only with

² Scholars have disputed the extent to which evangelical Protestant missionaries in Palestine represented the cultural arm of a British imperial project. A.L. Tibawi, in his still-important study *British Interests in Palestine, 1800-1901: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), makes the argument that although these evangelical religious movements aligned themselves with lower-class interests against the dominant aristocracy in the metropole, "when the masses left the home from still unsatisfied and embarked on ambitious schemes in the colonies and even in dominions of foreign sovereign states such as the Ottoman Empire, they openly joined in the expansion of Europe. The missions were the cultural aspect of the expansion which followed the territorial, commercial, and political expansion" (5). Andrew Porter mounts a broad challenge to this point of view in *Religious versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), and Eitan Bar-Yosef suggests with specific regard to Palestine that the Protestant evangelical interest in the "return of the Jews" was "continuously associated with charges of religious enthusiasm, eccentricity, sometimes even madness... beyond the cultural consensus." See *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 184.

global evangelization but also with domestic issues of social reform and, crucially, with promoting the abolition of slavery.

The CMS defined itself primarily in opposition to Catholicism. Discussions of CMS missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire during these early years explicitly promoted the idea of a Protestant presence in Palestine as combating the “Popish” practices of Catholic missionaries there. In 1812, the CMS Report suggested hopefully that “the Romish Church is manifesting gradual dissolution,” and that its “scattered members” could be replaced by a “United Church of England and Ireland.”³ The CMS leadership also noted that the Catholics had “set us an example in planting the cross wherever commerce of the sword had led the way, which may put to shame British Protestants.”⁴ Similarly, the CMS saw one of its primary duties as the salvation of Eastern Orthodox Christians by bringing them into an evangelical Protestant fold; its reports called for “assisting in the recovery of [the] long sleep of the ancient Syrian and Greek Churches.”⁵ Although there was a vague intention among these early CMS leaders of converting the “heathen,” which included the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, the most clearly imagined targets of their efforts were the other Christians whom the society conceived of as laboring under “Popish” beliefs and misconceptions. Islam received very little mention in the CMS’ discussion of its projects in the Ottoman provinces.

The other major British mission society to direct its attention towards Palestine was the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, usually known as the London Jews Society (LJS). This organization emerged as a branch of the London Missionary Society, a collection of evangelical Anglicans and Nonconformists formed in 1795. One of the LMS’ first missionaries, a German who had converted from Judaism, founded the LJS in 1809 with the purpose of “relieving the temporal distress of the Jews and the promotion of their welfare,” receiving patronage from the Duke of Kent.⁶ Initially, the new organization focused on proselytizing to the Jewish communities of London and its surrounds, but in 1820 it sent a representative to Palestine to investigate the conditions of the Jewish communities there. In 1826, a Danish missionary named John Nicolayson, representing the LJS, arrived in Jerusalem and

³ See Thomas Stransky, “Origins of Western Christian Missions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land,” in *Jerusalem in the Mind of the Western World, 1800-1948*, ed. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh and Moshe Davis (Praeger: Westport, Conn., 1997): 142

⁴ Cited in Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 22

⁵ Stransky, “Origins of Western Christian Missions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land,” 142

⁶ Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 6

began to hold Protestant services in Hebrew in the city. Despite tension between Nicolayson and the Egyptian administration, he began to lay the foundations for a mission church in Jerusalem in 1839.

The evangelical Protestant missionaries who worked in Palestine during these early years tended to refrain from comment about Muslim practices, but were openly horrified at the liturgies, educational systems, and institutional practices of the Eastern Christian communities with whom they came into contact. The revulsion that Protestants felt towards Orthodox practice came out especially clearly in their descriptions of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which early missionaries and travelers described as “loathsome,” a “labyrinth of superstition, quarrels over dogma, stenches and nonsense,” and “something between a bazaar and a Chinese temple rather than a church.”⁷ Ludwig Schellner, a German missionary working with the CMS, went so far as to suggest, “And is not the silent worship of the Muslims across the way, before the mosque, infinitely more dignified?”⁸

Generally, though, neither of these early missions in Palestine was at all concerned with the region’s Muslim populations, about which they knew very little. Rather, both the CMS’ and the LJS’ presence in Palestine was devoted to specifically evangelical Protestant concerns – anti-Catholicism in the case of the CMS and a new interest in worldwide Jewry in the case of the LJS. These early missionaries’ ignorance of Islam was almost total, to the point that Islam featured only as a vague evil in their reports and mission statements, against their specific, theologically determined interest in opposing Catholicism and converting the Jews. They drew their converts and made their local connections exclusively with the Christian and Jewish communities and institutions in Palestine, and thought of themselves as offering an alternative, not to Islam, but to the ritualistic, hierarchical practices of Catholicism and Eastern Christianity against which their theology constituted itself.

As such, these early Protestant missionary efforts tended to display greater sympathy towards the few American missions working in Palestine than towards their French counterparts. A report from 1839 by two Scottish ministers traveling in Palestine with a view towards establishing a Church of Scotland mission to the Jews detailed measures of cooperation between early British mission families

⁷ This last feeling was expressed by Kaiser Frederick William IV himself, who was so put off by his experience of visiting the church that he decided it could not possibly be the site of Christ’s grave. See Martin Tamcke, “Johann Worrelein’s Travels in Palestine,” in *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East*, ed. Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten (Münster : Transaction Publishers, 2006): 244.

⁸ Ludwig Schellner, *Reisebriefe aus heiligen Landan* (Koln, 1910), 38

and American mission travelers. They noted that George Dalton, the ill-fated first missionary sent to Palestine under the auspices of the newly formed LJS (he died very shortly after his arrival), had discussed the possibility of renting a convent with two of the earliest American mission travelers in the region, Jonas King and Pliny Fisk. They also reported that John Nicolayson had arranged to rent a house with two American missionaries in Jerusalem, and that in 1835 he had offered to board two other American missionaries named Dodge and Whiting. This account clearly demonstrates an assumption on the part of both Scottish and English missionaries that their work essentially overlapped with the goals of evangelical Protestant missions coming out of the United States, and that cooperation with American travelers and mission representatives would be mutually beneficial.⁹

There was no such sense of collaboration with the non-Protestants. British mission societies felt that Orthodox and especially Catholic institutions were attempting to obstruct their progress by exerting their influence with the Ottoman state to prevent Protestant missions from gaining a foothold in Palestine. One letter from a British resident in Beirut to the British and Foreign Bible Society in London, reporting on Protestant progress in the region, ascribed both American and British difficulties to Greek and French interference:

The Revd. Messrs Bird and Fisk American Missionaries in Syria have been the first to suffer the effects of the machinations of our enemies. These worthy Gentlemen were denounced last winter at Jerusalem to the Governor as bad people, who sold injurious books, and this accusation is universally attributed to the monks of the Terra Sancta ... [Further], the supposition is that were we indebted to the Roman Catholics for the opposition that the Porte is making to the circulation of the Scriptures... And I am sorry to say that I could name from authority two French Consuls in Syria who have written to Constantinople for the purpose of injuring our Cause, and attempting to expel the English missionaries from Syria altho' they have always professed a warm friendship for our Nation.¹⁰

The relationship between British missionaries in Palestine and the French and Russian Catholic and Orthodox bodies there was one of suspicion, based in both theological divides and political rivalry.

These early missionaries constituted their organizations as evangelical Protestant bulwarks against the evils of a “degraded” Christian ritual, rather than against the evils of an Islam about which they knew next to nothing. This theological orientation determined their local focus on the Christian and Jewish populations, to the exclusion of Palestine’s much larger Muslim community. It also determined a pattern of

⁹ V.D. Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land through British Eyes, 1820-1917: A Documentary History* (London: V.D. Lipman in association with the Self Publishing Association, 1989), 62ff.

¹⁰ Barker to British and Foreign Bible Society, Aug 27 1824, *Missionary Register* 1825, p. 324. Reprinted in Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land through British Eyes*, 73.

cooperation with American and German missionaries who shared their evangelical approach, and implacable opposition to the French and Russian Catholic and Orthodox presence.

Early archeological efforts

These missionary activities were unfolding alongside another new presence in Palestine: a Western Protestant community interested in studying Palestine's archeological sites with a view to illuminating biblical history. The British members of these groups displayed many of the same evangelical concerns as their missionary counterparts, and their specifically religious sensibility helped them to develop a presence in Palestine characterized by cooperation with their fellow Protestant American scholars and a general hostility towards the work of European Catholics.

The rise of interest in biblical archaeology in Palestine was in large part a response to the scientific challenges to biblical authority which had begun to come to prominence in the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹¹ The Palestine Association, founded in London in 1804, was dedicated to studying the region's history, geography and topography, with an especial interest in its biblical past. The Biblical Archeological Society, which emerged in London in the 1840s, took this approach a step further, openly seeking to prove the veracity of biblical narratives.

As the members of these societies began to travel around Palestine, their preoccupation with scientifically proving the truth of the Bible and their evangelical background formed a common ground with Americans working in Palestine for similar purposes. A series of American clergy, theologians and scholars, including Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, had appeared in the Middle East during the 1830s and 1840s with the purpose of producing scientific proof of the Bible's claims. Robinson's work was published in a journal entitled *The Biblical Repository*, whose editor called it "rich in its illustrations of scripture... the intelligent Christian will readily perceive most of the points of scripture which it elucidates and supports."¹² Robinson received practical assistance from a number of LJS and CMS missionaries in Jerusalem, including John Nicolayson, whom he mentioned in his articles about his travels in Palestine. The Royal Geographic Society in London honored Robinson for his work in 1842; its president, William

¹¹ Issam Nassar, *European Portrayals of Jerusalem: Religious Fascinations and Colonialist Imaginations* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 81

¹² Cited in Nassar, *European Portrayals of Jerusalem*, 82

Richard Hamilton (onetime secretary to Lord Elgin in Constantinople and an instrumental figure in seizing both the Parthenon marbles and the Rosetta Stone for the British Museum), told the Society that “we rise from the perusal of the book with a conviction that the Christian world is at length in possession of a work, under the guidance of which... they may make large and satisfactory advances towards an accurate knowledge of the geography of the Scriptures.”¹³ In another context, Hamilton wrote approvingly that the “history which he illustrates is in no instance warped or prejudiced... by monkish traditions.”¹⁴

A shared commitment to evangelical Protestantism and a suspicion of Catholic traditions helped to bind British and American biblical archeologists together. As in the case of the mission institutions, the theological precepts of evangelical Protestantism determined the focus of activity and the collaborations of early British archeologists in Palestine.

Further mission developments: the Anglican bishopric

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, was one of the most prominent and determined promoters of the LJS, and hoped to extend the reach of evangelical Protestantism further than the mission societies had yet managed. In 1838, he publicly suggested a new kind of Protestant presence in Palestine, noting that Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Armenians and Jews all claimed places of worship in Jerusalem and that the Protestants were the only religious group not to have this privilege.¹⁵ In his diaries, he mooted the idea of founding a Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem, suggesting that such an institution could have “jurisdiction over the Levant, Malta and whatever chaplaincies on the coast of Africa.”¹⁶ Through his personal connections with Lord Palmerston, then Foreign Secretary, Shaftesbury managed to convince the British government that the Jerusalem consulate should be charged with protecting the city’s Jewish communities, a role Palmerston saw as offering possibilities for the extension of British political influence vis-à-vis the other foreign powers in the Ottoman Empire.

In 1841, the king of Prussia, Frederick William IV, proposed a collaboration between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Prussia to create a Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem. The king

¹³ Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land through British Eyes*, 31

¹⁴ Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land through British Eyes*, 35

¹⁵ Anthony Ashley Cooper, “State Prospects of the Jews,” *The Quarterly Review* 63 (January 1839): 166-192.

¹⁶ Lester Pittman, *Missionaries and Emissaries: The Anglican Church in Palestine* (PhD diss, University of Virginia, 1998), 17

was dedicated to evangelical Protestantism, and harbored hopes of reuniting the Christian churches under a new Protestant umbrella. He also wanted to restore the episcopacy of the German Protestant church, thus rendering it equal to its Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican counterparts.¹⁷ In keeping with the evangelical interest in the Jewish communities of Palestine, the first bishop appointed to Jerusalem, Michael Solomon Alexander, was a former Jewish rabbi who had converted to Christianity. With Shaftesbury's enthusiastic backing, the idea of a Jerusalem Protestant bishopric quickly gained support among British evangelicals.

The cooperation between British and German evangelical Protestants, however, almost immediately ran into opposition. Anglo-Catholics in British objected to it on the grounds that theologically the Anglican church was closer to the Orthodox and Catholic churches than to the Prussian church, which did not have bishops.¹⁸ Some Germans objected to the secondary role they played in the bishopric's structure, which required Anglican approval of all decisions and appointments. Furthermore, the subsequent British government, under Lord Robert Peel, saw the bishopric as a potentially aggressive force that the French, Russians and Ottomans might perceive as a British threat. Here again, the British understood their presence in Palestine not in relation to Palestine's inhabitants but in relation to contemporary Christian theological debates and Great Power politics.

The second Protestant bishop to serve in Jerusalem was a Swiss-born, German-speaking clergyman named Samuel Gobat, who set a new tone for Anglican activity in Palestine by focusing on education. During his tenure as bishop (1846-1879), forty-two Anglican schools opened and the first two Palestinian Arab priests were ordained. German and English missionaries worked together to open ecumenical Protestant schools like the Schellner School in Jerusalem, and collaborated on bishopric projects like orphanages and clinics. The evangelical Protestant ties between these English and German missionaries were strong enough to produce a collaborative relationship for a few decades.

Like its missionary predecessors, the bishopric under Gobat deliberately defined itself not against Islam but against the Orthodox and Catholic churches in Palestine. To some degree, this was due to

¹⁷ By "episcopacy", the king meant the practice of appointing bishops claiming direct succession from the apostles. His father had united the Reformed and Lutheran churches to form the Evangelical Church of Prussia, and Frederick William hoped to carry this reform further by including the Anglican church in the fold.

¹⁸ John Henry Newman, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, later wrote that this collaboration between the Prussian and the British evangelical churches "finally shattered my faith in the Anglican church." Another Oxford Movement leader, Edward Pusey, told his cousin Shaftesbury that "our Church was never brought into contact with the foreign Reformation without suffering from it." See Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 47.

Ottoman legal strictures prohibiting proselytizing to Muslims; but it also reflected the essential self-definition of the European Protestant evangelical movement as a response to the “degenerate” forms and practices of Catholicism. Gobat paid almost no attention to the majority Arab Muslim population, focusing instead on establishing the Protestant church as an alternative to the Orthodox and Catholic communities for “native” Christians.¹⁹

His approach aroused considerable anger in both the Orthodox and the Catholic communities, and his tactic of recruiting students for the new Anglican schools from the Orthodox and Catholic communities brought on protests and even violent reprisals. In 1852, a Catholic mob descended on the CMS school in Nazareth, wrecking the building and injuring one of the missionaries working there. The Greek Orthodox patriarchate rapidly developed an intensely hostile relationship with Gobat, and in 1853 Orthodox protesters in Nablus attacked the Protestant Mission House during a service, causing the assembled congregation to flee in panic. The Orthodox patriarchate also discouraged association with Anglican institutions by threatening to evict non-compliant community members from their homes on church property. Although Gobat’s aggressive tactics in recruiting from the Orthodox community were sometimes reviled by English Anglicans who espoused the principle of Christian unity, his actions and activities had the effect of further defining the Anglican presence in Palestine as engaged primarily in a battle against “degenerate” forms of Christianity, rather than against Islam.

Where Gobat focused on opposing the Orthodox patriarchate and its influence, the CMS continued to see itself as working primarily against Catholic interests. The growth of a Western (and especially French) Catholic missionary presence in Palestine after the reinstatement of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem in 1847 caused despair among many CMS officials. In the report for 1854-55, one missionary noted the arrival of “four French nuns, with a chaplain” in Nazareth; he added despondently, “Thus we see the efforts of the Catholics doubled, but we remain single-handed.”²⁰ Another report a few years later described the French missionary presence as mainly intended to “counteract Protestant Missions,” and deplored the Catholic missionary establishment as one of the primary

¹⁹ One of the eventual results of this focus would be the rise of a new kind of sectarianism among Palestinian Arabs, with the Arab Christians who had represented the focus of attention for European missions and their new educational institutions emerging as the primary demographic of a new Palestinian Arab middle class. For more on this point, see Laura Robson, *The Making of Sectarianism: Arab Christians in Mandate Palestine* (PhD diss, Yale University, 2009).

²⁰ Klein, CMS Report 1854-5; cited in Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 172

roadblocks to Protestant mission work.²¹ One CMS missionary reported to his superiors in London that “the French nuns went round into all houses threatening the women, and thus preventing their coming [to the CMS school]. The Latins have opened a school in the house opposite ours and often some of their party stand before the Prot. school trying whether they can prevent our pupils from entering.”²² He also reported that the monks in the Franciscan monastery at Nazareth had engaged in publicly burning Protestant Bibles.²³ While Gobat was establishing the bishopric to work in opposition to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate, the CMS viewed itself as a bulwark against the French Catholic mission presence. With the LJS continuing to minister primarily to the Jewish community, all three major British mission institutions ignored Palestine’s Arab Muslims almost completely. Islam was essentially absent from the evangelical Protestant conception of the significance of the “Holy Land.”

These years saw a diminishment of the previously close relationship between British and American evangelicals in Palestine. Although the bishopric was initially an ecumenical project, it involved a number of people concerned to maintain the liturgical and theological traditions of the Anglican church, albeit in a low church, evangelical form. The new brand of Anglican missionary was better educated, less dedicated to an ecumenical Low Church theology, less suspicious of the Eastern churches and more inclined to promote the specifics of Anglican belief over the generalities of evangelical Protestantism.

George Williams, an Anglican priest in Palestine during the early 1840s, offered a sharp criticism of the American missionary tendency to draw converts from the Eastern churches despite their original resolution against this. “Well would it have been,” he wrote, “had this not only been avowed, but consistently acted upon from the commencement! then might that which is their declared object have been much nearer its accomplishment than now it is, if not through their agency, perhaps through the agency of others not less qualified for the task.”²⁴ He described the experience of one man converted to Protestantism by the Americans, upon discovering the virtues of the Anglican church: “An English Prayer-book fell into his hands, and he found that a Church, whose doctrines had been represented to him as identical with those of the Congregationalists, differed on many essential points... it was free from the

²¹ Proceedings of the CMS, 1858-9, 61-64; cited in Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 172

²² Cited in Charlotte van der Leest, “The Protestant Bishopric of Jerusalem and the Missionary Activities in Nazareth: The Gobat Years, 1846-1879,” in *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings*, 209

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ George Williams, *The Holy City: Historical, Topographical, and Antiquarian Notices of Jerusalem* (London: J.W. Parker, 1849), 572

errors that had drawn him from his old communion, and from the defects that he had observed in the new. He was delighted with the discovery; but his job was of short duration. He was told it was a dangerous book, containing many errors, and it was taken away."²⁵ Rifts were beginning to emerge between the British and the American missionaries working in Palestine, which would eventually lead to the American Congregationalists abandoning Palestine to focus their efforts on Lebanon.

In 1881, the collaboration between the Anglican and Prussian churches lapsed due to theological differences. The Jerusalem bishopric became purely Anglican in 1887, when the Jerusalem and East Mission was formed under the leadership of the new bishop Popham Blyth. Henceforth, the bishopric in Jerusalem would be much more closely involved with Anglican institutions in the metropole, and would move away from its ecumenical evangelical Protestant roots towards a more specifically Anglican and British approach.

After the reconstitution of the bishopric, the primary Anglican concern moved away from conversion and towards the maintenance of a British religious presence in the Holy Land and especially the Holy City. The new Anglican leadership rejected many of Gobat's and the CMS' tactics, and essentially dropped the idea of converting Arab Orthodox Christians to Anglicanism in the interests of Christian unity. As the Archbishop of Canterbury declared upon the re-introduction of the newly Anglicanized bishopric in 1887, "To make English proselytes of the members of those Churches, to make it the worldly interest of the poor to attach themselves to us, to draw away children against the wishes of their parents, is not after the spirit or usage of the foundation."²⁶ The new Anglican institution of the bishopric would henceforth take on a new role, less intent on evangelization and more focused on promoting the Anglican presence in Palestine as an outpost of specifically British, rather than ecumenical Protestant, cultural and educational values.

The Palestine Exploration Fund: evangelism and imperialism

²⁵ Williams, *The Holy City*, 573

²⁶ Cited in Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 221. Tibawi notes that Muslims in Palestine "were not even mentioned until the alliance between Gobat and the CMS produced loud protests at their joint encroachments on the preserves of the Greek Orthodox Church. The gloss was then invented that Eastern Christians must be converted to Protestantism, as a stepping-stone to the conversion of the Muslims. It has never been explained how in practice this was possible."

Shaftesbury had also long suggested undertaking archeological excavation in Palestine for the purpose of assembling evidence of the Bible's historical veracity.²⁷ In 1865, the founding of the Palestine Exploration Fund inaugurated a new era of Western scholarship about Palestine and particularly Jerusalem. The Palestine Exploration Fund's founders and early directors – among them George Grove, Walter Morrison, and Arthur Stanley – were nearly all participants in the evangelical Protestantism which drove the development of biblical archeology. Grove's father had been a peripheral figure in the Clapham Sect, Stanley was Dean of Westminster, and Morrison was a devoted churchgoer who donated generously to evangelical Protestant schools and charities. The Fund, while explicitly declaring itself to be secular and non-sectarian, was actually governed in almost all its activities by evangelical thought about the Western Protestant rediscovery of Palestine.

In its first meeting, the Fund agreed that “it should not be started, nor should it be conducted as a religious body,” but also agreed that “the Biblical scholars may yet receive assistance in illustrating the sacred text from the careful observation of the manner and habits of the people of the Holy Land.”²⁸ The founding members of the Fund did not want to alienate potential donors who might have reservations about a specifically evangelical approach to archeology; nevertheless, it was clear, as one member would later note, that “The Palestine Exploration Fund began its labours only with the object of casting a newer and a truer light on the Bible.”²⁹

Following the evangelical Protestant interest in the Jewish presence in the Holy Land, the Fund focused its attentions almost exclusively on excavations thought to be related to Old Testament sites and narratives. This was partly because the only known New Testament sites were under Greek Orthodox control, but it also reflected the strong British evangelical interest in the experience of the Jews. The work of the Palestine Exploration Fund was dedicated mainly to identifying sites and artifacts that could be linked to narratives of ancient Israel. Some of the rhetoric that accompanied these projects also suggested a nationalist imperial agenda, positing a philosophical comparison between the “Chosen People” of antiquity and their modern counterparts in the form of the British empire and its Protestant leaders.

²⁷ See Nassar, *European Portrayals of Jerusalem*, 83

²⁸ Resolutions of Palestine Exploration Fund, cited in Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 185

²⁹ Claude Reignier Conder, *The Future of Palestine: A Lecture* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1892), 35

The Archbishop of York's comments about Palestine in the opening meeting of the Fund in 1865 stand as a remarkable statement of both evangelical and nationalist mission: "This country of Palestine belongs to you and to me. It is essentially ours. It was given to the Father of Israel in the words 'Walk the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee.' ... We mean to walk through Palestine in the length and in the breadth of it because that land has been given unto us... it is the land to which we may look with as true a patriotism as we do to this dear old England, which we love so much."³⁰ This astounding declaration demonstrated the conflation of Protestant evangelical philosophy with the rising rhetoric of political imperialism during the second half of the nineteenth century, and suggested some of the ways in which an evangelical Protestant understanding of the significance of the Holy Land could be used to legitimize British political incursions into Palestine.

The Fund's history was soon to bear this out, as its members began to undertake archeological surveys that attempted to prove the veracity of biblical narrative but also functioned as undercover military operations for a government concerned to maintain a strong presence in Palestine vis-à-vis the other European powers.³¹ The conjunction of these two interests in the works of the Fund became very clear after 1869, when the institution decided to conduct full-scale surveys of Palestine in order to provide "the most definite and solid aid obtainable for the elucidation of the most prominent of the material features of the Bible," but also to provide accurate and detailed maps of Palestine to the British intelligence services for possible use in the defense of the Suez Canal in the event of Russian threats.³²

The members of the Palestine Exploration Fund working in Palestine displayed the same lack of interest in Islam and focus on the Jewish and Christian populations that British missionaries showed. Many of them assumed that Islam's reign of power in the Ottoman empire was on the wane, and that Palestine's Jewish and Christian populations would soon be paramount. One archeologist, writing in a Fund-published pamphlet, suggested optimistically that "The Moslem peasantry, whose fanaticism is

³⁰ John James Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the Holy Land* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 70-71

³¹ For an extensive investigation of the connections between the Palestine Exploration Fund and British military intelligence, see Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem*.

³² See Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 113-127 for a discussion of the intertwining of the Palestine Exploration Fund and the British intelligence services during the 1870s, when the British feared that Russia might threaten their control over Suez. Silberman points out that many of the maps and surveys the Fund produced during this period were eventually used in the British occupation of Palestine during the final stages of the First World War.

slowly dying out, coming under such influences [as the Jews and Christians] will gradually become more intelligent and more active, but will cease to be the masters of the country; and as European capital and European colonists increase in the country, it will come more and more into the circle of those states, which are growing up out of the body of the Turk.” Indicating the geopolitical context of such sentiments, he added, “With such a possible future it is hardly credible that western nations will permit the Holy Land to fall under Russian domination.”³³ For members of the Fund, like the evangelical Protestant missionaries who had preceded them, the Muslim and Ottoman presence in Palestine was little more than a temporary aberration; the true meaning of Palestine lay in its Christian and Jewish inhabitants, its biblical sites, and its importance to Great Power politics. This interpretation of Palestine’s history and significance, promoted by both mission groups and archeological societies, was now beginning to make its way into public rhetoric that sought to legitimize a British political claim to Palestine.

Conclusions

Evangelical Protestantism represented the dominant force behind the British presence in Palestine and especially in Jerusalem during the nineteenth century, manifesting itself in both mission institutions and archeological work. British participants in the projects of mission and archeology alike defined themselves in direct opposition to the practices and beliefs of Catholicism rather than Islam. They viewed themselves as part of a project to bring what James Cartwright called “pure” Christianity to the “Holy Land,” and understood Palestine’s significance as lying wholly in its biblical history and its importance to Western Christian theological and political rivalries. For these British travelers, the Ottoman and Muslim presence was an insignificant aspect of Palestine’s past and present.

This evangelical Protestant worldview did a great deal to determine the nature of the encounter between the British and the local Arab populations, as well as shaping British conflict and collaboration with other Western powers in nineteenth-century Palestine. It determined the British focus on local Christian and Jewish populations, rather than the much larger Arab Muslim community. Furthermore, the commitment to evangelical Protestantism meant that the British in Palestine tended to engage in cooperative efforts with American and German institutions and individuals who shared their Protestant

³³ Conder, *The Future of Palestine*, 34

outlook, while developing actively hostile relations with the French and Russian presence. And finally, it assisted the emergence of an understanding of Palestine as a place whose significance lay primarily in its Christian and Jewish heritage – an idea that would be used from the mid-nineteenth century onwards to legitimize a British political claim to the so-called “Holy Land.”