“Jerusalem During World War I: the Diary of Conde de Ballobar”

In the summer 1913 a young Spanish diplomat set out for the Holy Land in order to take office as Spanish consul in Jerusalem. Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita Conde de Ballobar arrived in Jerusalem during an extremely problematic period for the Ottoman Empire: constantly under internal and external threats. Central to Ballobar’s mission in Jerusalem was the protection and support of the Spanish clergy and properties in the region: in particular of the Custody of the Holy Land that had jurisdiction over the Catholics in Palestine, parts of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and Rhodes. By the beginning of the twentieth century the relationships between the Spanish clergy and other nationalities were poor, at times nonexistent, and the Custody was in a state of anarchy. In 1913 a Vatican attempt to fix the problems of the Custody triggered the growth of diplomatic tensions between the Vatican and Spain, but more importantly in Jerusalem a full scale diplomatic conflict erupted between the Spanish consul Casares and the Italian clergy over the so-called national privileges. Ballobar was sent to soften the relationship between Spain and the Custody and possibly challenging Italy and France over the protection of the Catholics in the Holy Land. However the outbreak of the war in the summer 1914 radically altered Ballobar’s mission and his historical agency.

Born in Vienna in 1885, his mother was Austrian of Jewish origin and his father was the military attaché to the Spanish embassy in the Austrian capital. In 1911 Ballobar entered the consular service and was appointed vice-consul to Cuba. In May 1913 he was

appointed consul in Jerusalem; though he arrived in August 1913, he travelled through the region for several months and served in Jerusalem until 1919. During his stay in the Holy City Ballobar wrote a diary recording events, feelings, impressions and opinions, proving to be a very attentive observer of war-time Jerusalem. When Ballobar reached Jerusalem his task was limited to the protection of Spanish interests, mainly religious in nature, and to re-stablish more friendly 'diplomatic' relations with the Custody of the Holy Land. By the time the British occupied Jerusalem in December 1917, he found himself to be the only consul in the city, in charge of protection of the interests of all countries involved in the war. Ballobar became a crucial personality, however as it will be discussed later, his agency and figure rapidly faded away.

In January 1920, Ballobar tired of his appointment in Jerusalem, finally moved to Damascus (actually a promotion but to a source of more complex problems) and in November of the same year to the more relaxed Tangiers where he served for a few months. After the end of the war he married in 1920 Rafaela Osorio de Moscoso, Duchess of Terranova, and in 1921 he resigned his commission as consul. Ballobar kept working for the Spanih Foreign Office, with a particular interest in the relation with the Holy See. He was offered several important appointments which he turned down; according to his family, Ballobar went back to Spain where he took care of the family business. Apparently his wife was not eager to raise their five children while travelling around the world. They mostly lived in Botorita, a small village in the outskirts of Zaragoza, where Ballobar's daughter recalled that Ballobar grew an olive tree that was

taken from the Garden of the Gethsemane. In August 1936 Ballobar decided to publicly support Francisco Franco and his 'Junta de Denfensa Nacional de España' against the left-wing Popular Front that won the election a few months earlier. Due to anti-clerical violence against the Church that took place after the elections, it is not surprising that the devout Ballobar supported Franco, nevertheless Ballobar remained a strong supporter of the monarchy and his support to the new regime was more of convenience rather than of belief. From August 1936 Ballobar was first appointed in the Diplomatic Cabinet of the 'Junta' and then as Secretary of the External Relations of Franco's Foreign Office. During the interwar period and in the 1940s Ballobar mainly worked at the Spanish Foreign Office, with a particular interest in the relations with the Holy See. In the same period Ballobar was offered important positions as consul around the world, such as Canada or the United States, however he did not accept these appointments. Ballobar's wife was not ready to move and the education of their children was more important. He asked for short leaves of absence which he alternated with short periods at the Spanish Foreign Office. In January 1948 a terrorist attack carried out by the Haganah against the Semiramis Hotel in Jerusalem killed Manuel Allendesalazar, Spanish vice-Consul in Jerusalem, who was the brother of Ballobar's daughter's husband, Jose Allendesalazar. I am not sure if there is any connection, but a year later in May 1949 Ballobar was appointed once again consul to Jerusalem where he served until 1952. He then moved back to Spain where he was appointed Director of the *Obra Pia*, office he covered until 1955 when he retired. Ballobar eventually died in Madrid in 1971 aged 86.

Ballobar often discussed in his diary the military aspects of the conflict he was witnessing hence it is rather important to briefly outline the situation in the battlefield and how this was reached through a slow process which preceded the war itself. The outbreak of the First World War was not the first incident in which the Ottoman Empire was challenged both internally and externally. In 1908, the Young Turks overthrew the Sultan Abdülhamid II and re-instated the constitution which was suspended in 1876. The Empire was then attacked by the Italians in 1911 and lost Libya. The following year, the outbreak of the Balkan wars additionally weakened the position of the Ottoman government. Eventually in 1913 the leadership of the Empire changed when a *coup d'etat* staged by the member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) installed a military dictatorship. In the months preceding the outbreak of the war in 1914 the Ottoman Empire was diplomatically isolated. Most of the European governments considered the Porte to be on the brink of collapse. Prior to 1914 Britain acted as an ally of the Ottoman Empire with the purpose to defend the Dardanelles from Russia and to protect the imperial route to India; however by the outbreak of the war in August 1914 the British were no longer interested in any alliance with the Ottomans and British policies towards the Ottoman Empire radically changed. Rough plans for the partition of the Ottoman Empire preceded the outbreak of the war and the war simply acted as a catalyst for those plans which were drawn by Great Britain, France and Russia; they envisaged the complete and final downfall of the Ottoman Empire and to finally solve the 'Eastern Question'. It was taken for granted that in one way or the other as a result of the war the Ottoman Empire would be dismembered.

As mentioned earlier, before joining the Central Powers, the Ottoman Empire was left in a state of ambivalent neutrality towards the warring parties. This ambivalent neutrality was not meant to last as the CUP was desperately looking for an ally in Europe. In the two years preceding the war, German-Ottoman relations were cold. Both the Young Turks and members of the CUP disliked German's support of the Hamidian regime. However, things were to change. When the war began the British government refused to deliver the two war-ships - *Sultan Osman* and *Reşadiye* - commissioned by the Ottomans, which had been financed through a popular subscription. Although this caused a great deal of popular resentment which was echoed in official circles, Great Britain was still considered the natural ally of the Ottoman Empire by many politicians such as Cavid, the CUP Minister of Finance. However on 28 July 1914 Enver Paşa, Minister of War, met the German ambassador Wangenhaim in secret to discuss a defensive alliance with Germany while Cemal Paşa, Minister of the Navy, continued to favour contacts with France. In August, ideological, economic and geopolitical factors, and the personal pressure of the Kaiser Wilhelm II himself brought together the Ottoman and German Empires with a secret agreement signed by the CUP triumvirate in power, Talat, Enver and Cemal, and the German representatives.

When Russia entered the war alongside the Entente, the *casus foeder* arose. The CUP, however, delayed the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the conflict for a number of reasons including the fact that the government was in no condition to fight a war. Logistics was the main problem as the government could not easily deploy the army

throughout the vast domains of the Empire. Moreover the Ottoman involvement in the war operations was dependent on supplies from their German and Austrian allies. On 9 September 1914, unilaterally, the Ottoman Empire declared the abolition of the capitulations regaining at last full sovereignty over its subjects. At the end of October 1914 Ottoman war-ships opened fire against a Russian naval base in the Black Sea but it was only in November that the Ottoman officially entered the war. The Ottoman army was mobilised in August and it was composed of four army Corps whose effectiveness had to be tested. Ottoman officials hoped to increase military performance during the war thanks to the German support. In this context Palestine came under the military district of Syria commanded by Cemal Paşa, now military governor of Syria and Commander of the 4th Army.

The British, since the outbreak of the war in 1914, had focused their military activity on Egypt which was under British control since 1882. Although the war cabinet advocated the direct annexation of the country, it was eventually declared a British protectorate in December 1914. British officials were concerned with a possible attack launched against the Suez Canal, which was vital for British interests in the region and beyond. In the early stages of the war, Palestine was a secondary issue on the agenda of the British War Office as military operations conducted in the Middle Eastern front were to serve the strategic necessities of the British Empire. A surprise offensive against the Suez Canal was launched from Syria in early 1915 but failed with heavy losses on the Ottoman-German side. Ottoman victories in Mesopotamia and at Çannakale (Gallipoli)

and the hope that a further attack on the Canal would raise an anti-British rebellion in Egypt in the name of Islam, led the German and Ottoman commands to plan a second strike. By the beginning of the summer of 1916 the troops were ready, but the British soon discovered the advance through air recognition. By mid-August the British outnumbered the German-Ottoman troops *de facto* ending their Palestinian campaign.

Palestine and Syria had remained virtually unscathed as mentioned earlier in relation to the direct conflict between the British and the Ottomans, but in 1917 the British army led by General Archibald Murray, who was appointed commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) in January 1916, moved from a defensive strategy to an offensive one. He attempted twice to take Gaza in the spring of 1917 but both campaigns failed. In London the Military High Command and the new Prime Minister David Lloyd George viewed the inability to take Gaza as unacceptable. While the British army was in some way advancing, the Ottoman and German commands established a new military unit called Yıldırım (storm) under the command of General Erich von Falkenhayn. The purpose was to launch a strike against the British forces in Southern Iraq with guerrilla tactics. Although this new corps was meant to be offensive, it turned out to be a defensive force. In view of the British advance towards Palestine, Von Falkenhayn in 1917 suggested that the Yıldırım was to be sent in Palestine in order to defend the Gaza-Beersheba line rather than defending an indefensible Baghdad. It was however too late. By 7 November 1917 the Ottoman-German troops were retreating from the Palestinian front, and the path for the British advance towards Jerusalem was opened.

In June 1917, General Edmund Allenby assumed command of EEF with instructions to prepare for an offensive campaign during the autumn and winter. He soon adopted new and more hazardous military strategies which allowed the British army to occupy Gaza trough Beersheba. Jerusalem was eventually taken from Gaza before Christmas in fulfillment with the order of Lloyd George to make Jerusalem a gift for the nation.

Besides military action, with the beginning of the hostilities also planning became more consistent and in 1915 Britain agreed to the Russian occupation of Istanbul and the straits while the French government began to claim Syria. At the same time Hebert Samuel, the President of the Local Government Board, submitted a proposal to the Foreign Office in order to create a Jewish national home in Palestine. In London, British officials wondered whether acquisition of new territories in the Middle East would strength or weaken the global position of their Empire. As the idea of partitioning was becoming more and more consistent and other agreements for the partition of the Middle East were put ahead, the British government established in 1916 the De Bunsen committee which made a number of recommendations according to different scenarios that would result at the end of the war. In relation to Palestine and in particular to Jerusalem, the committee recommended that Jerusalem and the holy places should be internationalised. Jerusalem and Palestine were also mentioned in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 and in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence of 1915; however the position of the city in the future arrangement of the Arab Middle East remained intentionally vague.

Important to underline is the fact that Palestine, though not at the centre of major battles, apart from the late 1917, served as one of the 'home fronts' of the Ottoman Empire and it was still very much affected by the war, especially the civilian population. The presence of Ottoman and German forces contributed to radical changes in the local landscape as well as the sea blockade which caused grave consequences such as the increase of the price of basic resources creating a long-term famine and isolating Palestine from the outside world. Consequences that Ballobar, in different ways from the majority of the population, felt and recorded in his diary providing a different perspective on war-time Jerusalem as it will be discussed later. Set the historical context into which Ballobar lived and operated as historical agent, let us turn our attention to the consul and his personal experience in Jerusalem.

The major concern for Ballobar at the beginning of the war was the status of the Catholic religious institutions in the city and broader region. At the end of 1914, Ottoman authorities informed religious orders to abandon their convents and gather in residences in Jerusalem. Several times the Spanish diplomat ran to see the local Ottoman military commander, Zaky Bey, asking him to stop the occupation of convents and hospices. Ballobar was also concerned with the fate of the French and other clergy who were deported from Jerusalem to Syria, or left for Egypt. Ballobar was charged with the protection of British and French interests in Palestine, later on also with Italian and American interests; ironically when the Austrian and German troops left, he had to take care of those interests too, becoming the universal consul in Jerusalem representing

virtually all foreign interests in Jerusalem. Ballobar became also involved with the protection of the Jewish community. At first he helped the Jews as needy citizens of war-time Jerusalem, however as a consequence of the breaking of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1917, he was charged with the distribution of financial help to the Jews which was mainly coming from America. Life in Jerusalem was not easy as inhabitants had to face several challenges during the war, including an invasion of locusts that destroyed whatever was in their path as witnessed by Ballobar in March 1915. The damage caused by the locusts was instrumental in a further rise of prices, causing even more hardship for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Palestine. Famine and scarcity of food hit everyone in the region, including Ballobar. However the same Ballobar, through his diary, tells of a city that despite suffering a great distress was a city that fought back and dealt with the brutal disruptions of the war: annihilation was prevented thanks to the fluidity of communal relation, regardless of religion and social class.

As the war progressed Ballobar became increasingly aware that the Ottomans were likely to lose the war, at the same time he developed a strong friendship with Cemal Pasha from whom he obtained a substantial number of favors, benefiting Ballobar's protected people and institutions. Ballobar was quite critical of the Ottoman government; however he came to realize that the Ottomans established a system allowing for a working coexistence between different communities. He was certainly aware of the tragedy occurred to the Armenians, and, he was afraid Christian and Jews could have

suffered a similar fate in Palestine, but he acknowledged that Palestine was different and that the real enemy for the Ottomans was the growing Arab nationalist movement. The war came to an end in Palestine in December 1917, following a renewed British effort after several failed attempts to invade the region. Ballobar celebrated the event as liberation: his delight was not political but rather personal, in fact he finally was able to free himself from the heavy burden accumulated during the four years of war. At this point Ballobar began to reflect carefully about the future of the region. When he arrived in Jerusalem he had virtually no knowledge of the Middle East, but by December 1917 he was certainly more knowledgeable than many of the so-called British-French experts involved with the redefinition of the region.

Few days after the British conquest of Jerusalem, Ballobar was made aware of the Sykes-Picot agreement, later to become void, but still used as a blueprint for the future planning of the Middle East. Ballobar reported that: "Italy seems to have nothing to do with the Franco-British agreement about Palestine. […] France promised her help on the Spanish aspirations in the Holy Land." This would have been a great triumph for the Spanish consul whose mission was indeed to curtail Italian, and possibly French, influence in the region. However it was only several months later that Ballobar, with more information available, began to reflect on what the future of Palestine might have been. Since the issue of the Balfour Declaration promising the Jews the establishment of a National Home in Palestine, Ballobar grew suspicious of the Zionists as he was afraid Zionism could have become an element of instability in the region. In July 1918 reporting

the placing of the first stone of the future Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Ballobar noted: "Dr. Weizmann read us a pedantic speech […] the same gentleman read a telegram of support and sympathy, signed by Lord Balfour. After, Captain Coulondre read another from the French Government. […] But with the respect due to those gentlemen, it seemed to me a huge political error. Why? Well for one of two reasons: either it is dealing with the simple placement of the first stone of a university, it is dealing with a transcending political act, and both, when put like that, benefit Zionism. This last alternative would be putting oneself out in front of the Muslim and Christian element, especially the former." Ballobar was certainly right as the British had no plans to leave Palestine. Some of his fears about the impact of Zionism became true in November 1918 with the celebrations of the first anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. "For that one it was announced that 'there would be trouble' and there was. Some young Muslims and Christians gave a beating to various Jews, which was followed on Monday by a demonstration by those religious groups before the military governor, whom they asked to telegraph their protest against the Jews to the British Government. The aggressors were condemned to several months in prison […]. Yesterday it was announced that they were inclined [the British] to let them go free if they asked the Jews for forgiveness, to which the detainees or their families answered that they preferred to rot in jail before doing that. From which one can see that my forecasts are coming true about Lord Balfour's promises being well beyond his grasp." Ballobar was right, however his historical agency faded away as soon as the British arrived; there was no room for a fine and critical observer as the Spanish consul. His diary remained private for decades, as predicted by the Governor

of Jerusalem Ronald Storrs; pity the British were not interested in this material as they might have learned not only about one man's life but one city's history and fabric.

To date, the diary of Ballobar is the only diary produced by a western resident of Jerusalem during the First World War. To keep record of events or secure memories for a later period was, and still is, a common habit amongst the consular community. Ballobar was no different, and his diary has become a very interesting source that sheds light on lesser-known aspects of the history of the city. Above all, if compared with other diaries and memoirs produced by local residents in the same period, the diary of Ballobar becomes crucial to fundamentally changing the picture of war-time Jerusalem provided by many accounts produced soon after the war, which affected later academic and informative narratives. This does not imply these narratives were all-wrong, but they were certainly filled with stereotypes and general opinions weakly supported by unverified evidence.

The diary of the Spanish consul, and the context in which it was written, have been the focus of my previous discussion; here, the attention will shift briefly to two narratives produced by two Jerusalemites: Wasif Jawhariyyeh and Ihsan Tourjman. The diary of Tourjman and the memoirs of Jawhariyyeh have been very much the focus of the work of scholars like Salim Tamari, Issam Nassar and Abigail Jacobson. Their work has challenged conventional narratives in relation to the modernization of Jerusalem and its socio-physical definition. The memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, who was a local young musician belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church by the time war broke in Jerusalem,

sheds light on a community that disappeared after the arrival of the British in 1917, and certainly after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Through Wasif, as well as through other sources and, indirectly, also through Ballobar, the conventional spatial division of Jerusalem based on ethnic and religious lines is challenged, and clearly, the boundaries which were superimposed after the British occupation of the city were not necessarily defined by ethnicity or confession. The *mahallat* (neighborhood) was the primary unit; therefore, communalism was the real marker: Shared festivities and ceremonies, as well as solidarity, undermined the static picture of a city divided along religious and ethnic lines. Solidarity and shared events are often reported by Ballobar, but we may speculate in this area he was not a good observer, and neither was Bertha Vester Spafford of the American Colony. In the popular memoirs of Spafford, though influenced by later events, we can see that Jerusalem was not a stagnant city divided into four quarters. Even though, as suggested earlier, Ballobar was not a good observer, we can still see in his diary signs of a strong religious and cultural syncretism taking place in Jerusalem. Wasif experienced firsthand this syncretism, which meant that popular religious celebrations were shared: Wasif notes in his diary and memoirs the Jewish festivity of Purim also being celebrated by Christians and Muslims, while the Ramadan celebrations were very much an event involving all communities living in the city.

The writings of Ihsan Tourjman, a recruit in the Ottoman army who served in the *manzil*, reveal the misery of Jerusalem during the war. Tourjman, not being part of the Jerusalem elites, and certainly not part of the consular environment, focused on daily life,

taking a dimmer view of the Ottoman government. Unlike Ballobar, whose criticism was mainly influenced by his apparent and latent Orientalism, Tourjman criticized the Ottomans as part of the Ottoman collective. It would be very interesting to compare the two diaries to see how they perceived common experiences in Jerusalem. Diaries are the conversion of intimate thoughts into written words, which can allow us to project personal experiences into a larger context while trying to understand and define that context, as well as answer crucial questions through the eyes of those writers.

It is worth spending a few minutes on a specific issue in order to show how this diary turned to be crucial while studying historical events that unfolded in Jaffa in the spring of 1917. Given that Ballobar's mother was a converted Jew, and the particular region and period in which the diary unfolded, many may certainly wonder whether the Spanish consul was pro- or anti-Zionist. It is certainly a legitimate question, but one which has no clear answer. Ballobar first helped the Jews as needy citizens of war-time Jerusalem. He was then put in charge of distributing the financial help to the Jews, which mainly came from the United States once his American colleague, Glazebrook, left Jerusalem as a consequence of the breaking of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1917. Nevertheless, neither in the diary nor in other sources is there any evidence of his position on Zionism.

On 29 March 1917, Ballobar received a small group of Spaniards from Jaffa who informed him that while visiting Jaffa, two days earlier, the *mutasarrıf* of Jerusalem announced the order of evacuation of the city issued by Cemal Paşa. All inhabitants were

covered, although German and Austrian subjects could remain at their own risk. The principal reason for evacuation, according to the Ottoman authorities, was a possible attack against the city by the British. Many in German and Austrian circles thought this was a policy to force the Jews of Jaffa to leave. Jewish residents were very concerned, as German and Austrian Jews were invited to leave contrary to the order of evacuation which gave a choice to German and Austrian nationals. Fear of pogroms spread amongst the Jews of Jaffa, but the much-feared massacres did not materialize. In April 1917, about 9,000 Jewish residents of Jaffa left, the majority heading to Petah Tikva, while others moved to the Jewish colonies in Northern Galilee, and a small group headed to Jerusalem. Ballobar visited Jaffa on 11 April and noted that not many Jews were left: Some watchmen and some farmers, but, in the words of the consul, the city was 'half dead.'

Despite various interpretations of these events, what really matters is how the news of the evacuation of Jaffa reached Europe and America, and Ballobar's role in this. The British received news through Aaron Aaronsohn, a Jewish Ottoman agronomist who was in charge of a small network of spies in Palestine, that 'Tel-Aviv has been sacked. 10,000 Palestine Jews are now without home and food. [...] Jemal has publicly stated Armenian policy will now be applied to Jews.' News that the Jewish community of Palestine was on the verge of annihilation quickly spread throughout the world. Comment and reportage in the Entente and neutral press, however, were less concerned with establishing the truth than with conveying the impression that Palestine had been

devastated, the Jews being the sacrificial victims of the Ottomans. In Germany, too, concern grew and a press campaign was staged, trying to undo the damage caused; the Germans even called for the establishment of a commission of inquiry. Neutral countries like Spain and the Netherlands, where sympathies towards the Entente and the Central Powers were divided, were called to investigate the matter. The commission did not materialize, but on June 11 Ballobar received a cable from the Spanish embassy in Istanbul asking him to be ready to investigate and write a report on the situation regarding the Jews in Palestine. Though the idea of a commission was shelved, a report of Ballobar's, is available in several archives:

[...] It is not true that there have been massacres or persecutions of Jews such as in Syria and Palestine; but that the Jews have only shared the same lot as the Christians owing to the application of the measure taken by the military authorities with the regard to the evacuation of those districts. Interestingly, Glazebrook, too, was invited to write a report on the events of Jaffa, even though he left Jerusalem in late May 1917; he had previously stated that the 'acts of violence said to have been committed against the Jewish population of Jaffa are grossly exaggerated.' Ballobar's small role in all of this – which could have become crucial – was almost completely ignored. The press reported nothing of the report he produced, and, in subsequent years, his historical agency has almost disappeared completely.

Allow me to conclude with an apology to the Consul. A recent review of the Diary pointed out that I had been quite harsh suggesting that Ballobar was not a careful

observer; the truth is that he might have not been interested in certain aspects of daily life, but he was indeed a very careful witness of those events unfolding around him. I can only imagine his relieve when on 27 May 1919 he wrote: "I had tea with General and Lady Money, as well as with Adrian Carton of Wiart. Very ceremonial. Before, I ate with Allenby, and I was bored there too. During these days I received a telegram from Hontoria, telling me that he cannot accept my resignation, but that he is soon granting me two months leave so I can come to Spain and *reflect*." The Palestine life of Ballobar was driven by his sense of duty and personality; passionate about his job, the diary reflects his practiced pessimism and, at the same time, his youthful confidence. In the end his writings are the embodiment of one man's life and city's history, which make them unique and invaluable.