

# JERUSALEM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## *Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century*

The year 1913 saw the culmination of a fierce conflict among the modern Jews of Jerusalem: the question of language. Ought Hebrew to be the language of daily life, as Eliezer Ben Yehuda, David Yellin and their friends insisted, or would it make more sense in the twentieth century for German to be the language of education, commerce and social life? The German Government in Berlin looked to the German language as a means of increasing its own influence, and made efforts to swing the debate its way. Part of the battle was fought in the schools. It was exacerbated in June 1913 when it was reported, wrongly in fact, that the Hebrew Grammar School in the city had placed itself under French protection.

Two rival systems of Jewish education were in conflict: the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools, financed by French Jews, and the schools and colleges financed by the German Hilfsverein, an organisation founded in 1901 to channel German Jewish philanthropy to Palestine. To counter this influence, the educator David Yellin founded a Hebrew Teachers' Seminary in Jerusalem. On 15 June 1913, and again two days later, the German Consul-General in Jerusalem, Edmund Schmidt, suggested to Berlin that the Kaiser's Government should place the Hilfsverein schools and colleges under German protection. This, Schmidt hoped, would restrain the 'radical Zionists from Hebraising the Hilfsverein school'.

The Zionists proposed a compromise: exclusive use of Hebrew in the Hilfsverein schools, but with German to be the language of instruction in the colleges, except for one science subject, which was to be taught in Hebrew. The Hilfsverein rejected this. But in one of the schools they had taken over, the Laemel School in Jerusalem, Hebrew was already the language of instruction. This was as a result of the efforts of the Hilfsverein's own Director of Education, Ephraim Cohn-Reiss, who was the first person to introduce Hebrew as the language of instruction in a Jewish school in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in 1913 Cohn-Reiss rejected a proposal made by the majority of his teachers to accelerate the process of Hebraisation in the schools under his authority.

The language controversy also had a political aspect. On 17 November 1913 the German Consul in Haifa, Julius Loytved-Hardegg, writing about the Zionists, warned Berlin: 'By excessive encouragement of a Jewish national language, they magnify the suspicions of the Arabs on the one hand, and weaken Jewry by this internal struggle on the other.' That internal struggle continued. On 10 December 1913 teachers and pupils demonstrated outside the Laemel School in Jerusalem in favour of Hebrew as the language of instruc-

tion in all Jewish schools. Windows were broken, and Cohn-Reiss called in the Turkish police to break up the protest. When the teachers were promptly dismissed, their pupils followed them out of the school building. The German Consul in Jaffa, Heinrich Brode, reported to Berlin that the Hebrew-language advocates were 'anarchist agitators'.

Elsewhere there were attempts at compromise. The headmistress of the Jerusalem Jewish Girls' School, Vera Pinczower, told the German Consul-General that, while Hebrew was the language of instruction in her school, German was strongly encouraged as a foreign language. The British Consul, P.J.C. McGregor, reported to the British Ambassador in Constantinople on 15 March 1914: 'The only Jewish educational establishment under British protection here is the Evelina de Rothschild School for Girls maintained by the Anglo-Jewish Association. This institution is a model of its kind and although placed under an ecclesiastical ban on account of its high standard of education, is conducted on the lines of orthodox Judaism. It is consequently in evil odour among the Zionists, who recently threatened to make things unpleasant for the Directress unless she gave a position of predominant importance to the Hebrew language, and I can only attribute the non-fulfilment of these threats to the fear of thereby compromising the scheme of obtaining British protection for their own undertakings, and also to the complete harmony prevailing between the Directress and her staff.'

Within a year the Zionist argument prevailed: that it was the Hebrew language that would best bring unity to a land where Yiddish, French and Ladino (the medieval Spanish spoken by many Sephardi Jews) were as much a part of daily Jewish life as German, if not more so, and where modern Hebrew was already established as the language of the Zionists both in their public work and in their private lives.

The German Government eventually accepted this. 'Germany would be sufficiently rewarded', a senior German diplomat wrote in March 1915, 'if, besides Hebrew, German would also be cultivated.' The defeat of Germany on the battlefield three years later finally ended the power of German officialdom to influence the debate.

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The annual influx of Russian pilgrims was as great in 1914 as it had ever been. Stephen Graham, an Englishman who accompanied one such Russian group that Easter from the Russian Black Sea ports, wrote: 'It was amazing to me to see the extent to which the pilgrims