

that Jews are the majority of artisans — which included the glaziers, blacksmiths, watchmakers, tailors, shoemakers, book-binders.⁵ In addition they almost monopolised money-lending and the limited banking business in the country.

Under Turkish rule Palestine was dominated by the leading Arab families who, principally on the strength of their long established local position, were recruited into the governing class of the Ottoman Empire. It was a kind of feudal system consisting of a small number of land-owning families and a backward peasantry, whereby the 'Ulama' (interpreters of Muslim laws and traditions) occupied a strong position, for they alone could confer legitimacy on the Ottoman government acts.

In his excellent study, *Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables*, Mr Albert Hourani analysed the relations of mutual dependence between the monarch and the notables; a concept which had far-reaching implications not merely under the Ottomans but throughout the period under study:

The political influence of the notables rests on two factors; on the one hand, they must have access to authority, and so be able to advise, to warn and in general to speak for society or some part of it at the ruler's court; on the other, they must have some social power of their own, whatever its form and origin, which is not dependent on the ruler and gives them a position of accepted and 'natural' leadership.⁶

The Ottoman attempt to reform administration — the *Tanzimat* (1856) — tended to strengthen the position of the notables rather than limit their role:

... Notables became 'Patrons' of villages, and this was one of the ways in which they came to establish their claims to ownership over them.⁷

Palestine and the Great Powers

The effects of the decline of the Ottoman Empire were not confined to the growth of the power of the notables. As the Ottoman state became increasingly dependent on foreign protection *vis-à-vis* other foreign powers as well as ambitious vassals, the European powers sought to establish direct links with the various populations of the Empire. Thus, France became the 'protector' of the Catholic communities in Syria,

Lebanon and Palestine, while the Orthodox Christians came under Russian protection. The British Government's interest in Palestine was aroused by Napoleon's Palestinian Campaign (1799) which posed a threat to the British overland route to India. When Mohammad 'Ali of Egypt occupied Palestine and Syria and defeated the Ottoman armies, even threatening Constantinople itself, the British Government adopted a course of military intervention and was instrumental in driving the armies of Ibrahim Pasha (son of Mohammad 'Ali) back to Egypt. It was during that period (1838) that the British Government decided to station a British consular agent in Jerusalem and to open the first European Consulate in March 1839.

Mohammad 'Ali's advance into Syria opened the 'Syrian Question'. New British policies were formulated as a result. To begin with, Britain sought to emulate the French and the Russian approach in the area. It was during the 1840s and 1850s that the British Government, which had no obvious protégés of its own, established a connection with the Jews in Palestine, the Druzes in Lebanon and the new Protestant churches. 'Behind the protection of trade and religious minorities there lay the major political and strategic interest of the powers.'⁸

From its start, British presence in Palestine was associated with the promotion of Jewish interests. Albert Hyamson stated, '... this question of British protection of Jews became, however, and remained for many years the principal concern of the British consulate in Jerusalem'.⁹ In a dispatch to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, Viscount Palmerston explained why the Sultan should encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine over and above the material benefits:

... the Jewish People if returning under the Sanction and Protection and at the Invitation of the Sultan, would be a check upon any future evil Designs of Mehemet Ali or his successor.¹⁰

The Rise of Political Zionism

Modern political Zionism could be said to have been the outcome of the failure of the era of liberalism and equality which had been heralded by the French Revolution, on the one hand, and the growth of nationalist and colonialist ideas and aspirations in nineteenth-century Europe on the other. For in spite of Rothschild's ascendancy in European finance, that of Disraeli (a converted Jew who gloried in his origins) in British politics and that of Lassalle in the leadership of German socialism, the *Haskalah*, the 'Enlightenment' or Jewish assimilationist movement, was not a complete success. This partial