

## **Zionism, 1862-1897: Foundations of a Movement**

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### **Abstract**

This research focuses on the birth of Zionism, tracking its growth from a radical fringe movement to a mainstream nationalist undertaking. It focuses on the people and the events that shaped its emergence, revealing the diversity of opinions that marked Zionism's early development. The backbone of this research rests on three places: the essays, memoirs, and letters of pre-Zionist and Zionist thinkers, critiques of Zionism from Arab intellectuals, Turkish officials, and anti-Zionist Jews, and statistical data on Palestine gathered by British officials. These sources constitute the backbone of the research, providing information critical to understanding early Zionism and its interaction with Palestine. The secondary sources pull from a spectrum of historiographical opinions that provide background that further explains and contextualizes the primary sources. The research explains how Zionism emerged when the revival of anti-Semitism legitimized the ideas of pre-Zionist theorists and shattered the hopes European Jews had for emancipation. Jewish intellectuals and radicals began to develop the core tenants of Zionism while Zionist societies established the first colonies in Palestine. Central to these early actions was the conviction that if the Jews wanted to survive they would have to save themselves by establishing a Jewish political entity. The characteristic Zionist prejudice against the Palestinian people developed in tandem with this belief. All these events culminated in 1897 with the first Zionist Congress and the official emergence of a practical Zionist plan for the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine. This research explains distinctive Zionist beliefs, how they developed, and why Zionists are attached to them. Overall, it demonstrates that early Zionism, rather than being a static idea, was influenced by a wide range of beliefs from a number of people who all worked to shape early Zionism.

**Keywords: Zionism, Anti-Semitism, Palestine**

### **1. Introduction**

During the nineteenth century, the European Jewish community underwent a transformation caused by ideas long in development catalyzed by oppression and exclusion. It began with a dramatic and unexpected increase in anti-Semitism, which initiated the emergence of Jewish nationalism from long entertained desires for a Jewish home. Although the movement didn't gain popular support till the beginning of the twentieth century, it had been developing as an ideology since the middle of the 1800's. A theory generally entertained by radicals and revolutionaries, Zionism did not result in any practical response till 1881, when anti-Semitic violence broke out in Russia following Alexander II's assassination. At this point, small groups of secular Jews began immigrating to Palestine with hopes of establishing independent, utopian communities. However, due to their lack of any of the practical knowledge necessary for such an endeavor, most of them ended up working on colonies controlled by the wealthy British Jew, Baron de Rothschild. Palestine, at this point, was under the administration of the Ottoman Empire, which was struggling under the encroaching influence of European power. Although no organized resistance to Jewish colonization of Palestine existed at this time, Ottoman authorities, Arab intellectuals, and the Palestinian peasantry expressed concerns about the development of a national movement aimed at the establishment

of would amount to a European nation in the Middle East. In 1896, the assimilated journalist, Theodor Herzl, published his decisive essay, *Der Judenstaat*, transforming Zionism from a cultural and individualistic movement into one with political and national scope. At the first Zionist Congress in 1897, the foundations were laid for the future not only of the Jewish people, but for Palestine and the rest of the Arab Middle East. The first fifty years of Zionism contain the story of the ideological foundations of Zionism and its establishment as a legitimate political endeavor. Zionism did not result from a single person or as a reaction to a single event. Instead, as this research demonstrates, Zionism was a compilation of ideas both old and new formulated by a host of people during the nineteenth century that paved the way for its rapid political rise at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## 2. Research

The development towards Zionism began in the nineteenth century with the growth of modern anti-Semitism after the end of the European Enlightenment. The Jewish people had filled the role of second-class citizens in Europe since Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. They experienced a brief respite following the French Revolution in France and when Alexander II became tsar of Russia. Despite politically emancipating the Jews, these leaders required certain promises in return, such as the renunciation of any belief in Jewish nationality as well as the rejection of rabbinical authority over Jewish life. After emancipation, many upper-class Jews embraced the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment, either assimilating through conversion to Christianity, or taking part in the German-Jewish reform movement in an attempt to restore the authenticity and dignity to the Jewish faith in an age when tradition failed to provide a motivation for faith.

Until Alexander II's assassination in 1881, Jews enjoyed privileges and freedom they had never before possessed. Except for anti-Jewish riots in 1819 and 1848, violence had decreased while opportunity had increased, especially in Western Europe. Jewish communities grew across Europe and mixed marriages became more acceptable. These changes affected Jews of most social classes, allowing the upper-class to enter politics and causing the emergence of a strong middle class. Although Russian Jews still did not experience the same freedoms as their western brethren, they were confident that the leadership of Alexander II would only improve their situation. Most Jews still acknowledged the existence of anti-Semitism but "the whole spirit of the age encouraged their natural wish to believe that [it] was vestigial. It would inevitably fade away, along with the whole bad dream of the past of the Jews in Europe."<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to Jewish hopes, anti-Semitism was anything but dying out. Instead, as Jewish Europeans became wealthier, began entering public service, and started taking on significant cultural roles, resentment steadily grew. Some Europeans grew upset at what they perceived as the undue influence of Jews on European culture. It mattered little to Europeans whether these Jews were practicing or apostate. In most major European cities, Jews counted for a small proportion of the population yet made up a considerable amount of the wealth.<sup>2</sup> Jewish artists, scientists, and scholars began to emerge, gaining prestige and making significant cultural contributions. Many Jews "Believed that they were part of the people they lived among, with equal rights and obligations – that there was no longer a Jewish 'community'."<sup>3</sup> Thus, despite Europe's push to emancipate the Jews, it rapidly became apparent that many in Europe were incapable of ever viewing Jews as anything but separate and foreign.

This resentment coincided with the rise of nationalism, causing many to wonder why the Jews, who possessed a different religion and a separate cultural and ethnic heritage, should have so much influence in non-Jewish countries. This coincided with the dangerous "transition from religious to racial anti-Semitism."<sup>4</sup> Similar to racism in America, anti-Jewish racism caused anti-Semitism to become increasingly irrational. As influential Europeans continued to lament how the Jews were destroying Europe or pronounce them culturally and racially inferior, many Jews began to have doubts about the new safety they enjoyed. Although some tried to defend Judaism against the many attacks, most started to believe that "it was pointless to try to refute anti-Semitism logically...there was no room for dialogue."<sup>5</sup>

During this time of uncertainty, pre-Zionist philosophy began slowly emerging from the minds of a small minority who foresaw the recurrence of anti-Semitism, knowing political emancipation could not provide a permanent solution. Three important influences affected this development.<sup>6</sup> The religious Messianic tradition provided the basis for these early beliefs, contributing the long-held faith in the permanence of the Jews, their status as God's chosen, and the eventual end of the Diaspora. The second influence came from European nationalism as well as political and social liberalism. The desire for a unified Jewish state merged with the desire to escape the restrictions of the old feudal powers. Finally, anti-Zionism emanated from the struggle of the emancipated Jew in a post-ghetto and increasingly hostile modern world. It's important to note that as Zionism emerged, especially in its early stages, it did not enjoy the same level of popularity or influence that it did in the twentieth century.

Such was the case with Moses Hess, an idealistic socialist who published a small work in 1862 titled Rome and Jerusalem. Inspired by the unification of Italy in the Risorgimento, Hess believed that the Jewish people must unite around the symbol of Jerusalem just as the Italians had united around Rome. Although he wrote during the 1860's when most Jews hoped that anti-Semitism was dying out, he believed the modern irrational and racial anti-Semitism had too powerful a hold on European minds to ever die naturally. Convinced that neither reform nor assimilation could save the Jews, he wrote: "An act of conversion cannot relieve the Jew of the enormous pressure of German anti-Semitism. The Germans hate the religion of the Jews less than they hate their race – they hate the peculiar faith of the Jews less than their peculiar noses. Reform, conversion, education and emancipation – none of these opens the gates of society to the German Jew; hence his desire to deny his racial origin."<sup>7</sup>

Unable to ever change their race, the Jews could expect nothing less than continued hatred while they remained in exile. Hess believed that the Jews must embrace their language and culture, writing that "only a national renaissance can endow the religious genius of the Jews...with new strength, and raise its soul once again to the level of prophetic inspiration."<sup>8</sup> And if the Jews did not possess a national homeland in which to undertake this renaissance, then they would never emancipate themselves from their exile. He criticized harshly the reformers who believed that the Jews were supposed to remain in exile in order to humanize intolerant Christianity. Hess argued that such a mission could never be accomplished without a politically organized religion.

Hess had focused primarily on racism in Germany, yet it was events in Russia that provided the impetus needed to turn Jews toward thoughts of nationalism. Despite Alexander II's attempts at emancipation, Russian Jews lived under circumstances more severe than in Western Europe. The first modern pogrom took place in Odessa in 1871 with unrest continuing through the rest of the decade instigated primarily by Slav nationalists.<sup>9</sup> The situation worsened after Alexander II's assassination on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1881 when his son, Alexander III became tsar. His death marked "the moment in which the notion of the inevitable and universal triumph of liberal ideas receives its first great setback."<sup>10</sup> Determined to destroy liberalism and restore Russian greatness, Alexander III signed into effect the May Laws which ushered in thirty years of oppression from 1881 to 1911. Blaming the Jews for the assassination, the Russian bureaucracy portrayed revolution as a Jewish plot and subsequently inspired a number of pogroms beginning in 1881. By the end of that year, 215 Jewish communities had been attacked, following a pattern of "looting, on a huge scale, arson, drunken brutality, rape and physical injury, pushed in relatively few cases to the length of murder."<sup>11</sup> Although the Russian government did not officially authorize these pogroms, very few people were punished for perpetrating them. Fortunately, the pogroms ended in 1884, not to break out again until 1903. However, the anti-Semitism that saturated Russian society had become official policy as a slow, yet steady de-emancipation took place. Mostly this involved limiting the number of Jews in higher education as well as undercutting their economic endeavors to the extent that by the end of the nineteenth century, almost forty percent had to rely on charity to survive.<sup>12</sup>

The sudden resurgence in anti-Semitism caused an equally sudden reversal in the faith many Jews had in emancipation.<sup>13</sup> The pogroms caused Leon Pinsker, a doctor from Odessa, to turn his back on the enlightenment ideas of assimilation. In 1881, he traveled to Western Europe in an attempt to gather support for his plan for ensuring Jewish survival. Although unsuccessful, this campaign allowed him to organize and develop his ideas in preparation for an essay he published in September 1882 called *Selbstemanzipation* (self-emancipation). In the essay, Pinsker systematically described the phenomenon of Jewish homelessness as direct product of a deeply ingrained and completely irrational anti-Semitism. He criticized emancipation writing that "legal emancipation is not social emancipation, and with the proclamation of the former the Jews are still far from being emancipated from their exceptional social position."<sup>14</sup> He determined that the problem resided ultimately in the Jewish lacking a physical homeland. Without a nation of their own, Jews would forever be viewed as "the Ghostlike apparition of a living corpse...a people without unity or organization."<sup>15</sup> Above all, he stressed that no nation could ever save the Jews. They must liberate themselves, hence the title, "auto-emancipation". Pinsker did not specify what land should become the home for the Jews, although he mentions the advantages of settling in Argentina or Palestine. He was less concerned with locale than with the goal of creating a nation for the Jews. A practical man, Pinsker realized that his plan would need the support both of private benefactors as well as the assistance of other countries, aid which he believed would be gladly offered when Europe saw a way to get rid of their "Jewish problem".

Although his ideas failed to gain traction in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, especially Russia, eagerly embraced him. Originally, he disregarded Russian Jews as too oppressed by tsarist restrictions to ever provide the political and financial support that Western Jews could. However, after failing to gain traction in the Western Europe, he turned back to Russia, acknowledging that "It is our most wholesome, most reliable element."<sup>16</sup> Up until 1881, most Jews, especially those with a secular education, believed that Russia was slowly evolving into a model liberal society. The harsh reality of the May Laws and Pogroms forced them to abandon this hope in favor of emigrating west, working for the revolution in Russia, or Jewish nationalism. Although Pinsker's ideas enjoyed a level of

popularity earlier nationalists could never hope to experience, the numbers who supported nationalism was still very small.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time that Pinsker was developing his ideas of auto-emancipation, small groups of Jews began meeting secretly across Russia. Known as Hovevei Zion, meaning Lovers of Zion, these loosely connected organizations were constituted of intellectual Jews who had been transformed by the unexpected persecution of the pogroms. They had been forced to eschew their hopes for assimilation and to recognize “that the complete adaptation of the Jews to the surrounding world might be possible for individuals but not for Jewry as a whole.”<sup>18</sup> Like Pinsker and other intellectual Jews, the members of Hovevei Zion societies had become disenchanted with emancipation and assimilation when anti-Semitic violence broke out in Russia in 1881. As a result of anti-Semitic behavior, a small number of Jews began to immigrate to Palestine in what became known as the first Aliya.

The first Aliya occurred between 1881 and 1903 and involved the immigration of between twenty and thirty thousand Jews to Palestine.<sup>19</sup> Although initiated by Russian anti-Semitism, most of the immigrants did not ally themselves with the emerging nationalist movement. The majority of these immigrants settled in Jerusalem and other major cities, integrating with the Old Yishuv, the existing Jewish community in Palestine at the time. Despite its name, the Old Yishuv was not entirely constituted of Jews who had lived in Palestine for centuries.<sup>20</sup> Ashkenazic Jews, meaning those of European descent who immigrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth and centuries, constituted the majority. Sephardic Jews constituted the rest of this unique community of Jews. The members of the Old Yishuv depended entirely on a system of donations from Europe called Halukka. When refugees from Europe arrived in Palestine, the Old Yishuv and the Halukka system absorbed an overwhelming majority of them.<sup>21</sup> And although participating in the Aliya, most of these immigrants, even if part of a Hovevei Zion group, were motivated more by a desire to escape Russian oppression than by Jewish Nationalism.

One group, however stood out from the rest of the immigrants to Palestine. Calling itself Bilu, an acrostic of the Hebrew verse “House of Jacob, let us go”, this society of about three hundred members, possessed “a sense of national mission”.<sup>22</sup> Made up almost entirely of young students and tradesmen, the Bilu'im wanted to escape “the false dream of Assimilation” and establish Jewish colonies in Palestine.<sup>23</sup> In their Manifesto, they confronted the rest of the Jews who had yet to embrace any nationalist sentiments, saying “Hopeless is your state in the West; the star of your future is gleaming in the East.”<sup>24</sup> The Bilu'im began their quest for a colony in Palestine by traveling to Constantinople to gain the authorization of the Ottoman Sultan. The Turks, however, were completely uninterested in authorizing Jewish immigration to Palestine.

In November 1881, the Ottomans had authorized limited Jewish immigration to all Ottoman territory except for Palestine on the condition that all immigrants become Ottoman subjects.<sup>25</sup> Having already experienced Balkan nationalism, they wanted to prevent the creation of another national problem in their territory. In addition, the Ottomans feared an increase in the population of foreign, particularly European subjects. Already suffering under the “Capitulations,” a system of privileges granted only to Europeans, they hoped to avoid relinquishing more power to Europe. When the Bilu'im arrived in Constantinople, they made their chances at Turkish authorization of their plans even more unlikely by unwittingly presenting themselves as everything the Turks feared. Not only did they openly bill themselves as a nationalist movement, but they grossly exaggerated the numbers of nationalist Jews as well as referring to powerful European and Jewish figures as supporters.<sup>26</sup> Hence, the Bilu'im looked less like a group of Jews seeking refuge from Russian oppression and more like European Nationalists. Not surprisingly, then, the Ottomans refused to grant permission to the Bilu'im to immigrate to Palestine.

After receiving this decision, most of the Bilu'im returned to Russia while a small group of fourteen decided to ignore both Ottoman restrictions and the advice of other Jews, and continued on, arriving in Palestine in July, 1882.<sup>27</sup> Due to their complete lack of agricultural experience as well as the hostility of the Orthodox Old Yishuv, the Bilu'im immediately met with severe difficulties. With no money or experience, they entered Mikveh Israel, a markedly non-nationalist training school established twelve years earlier.<sup>28</sup> Eventually they joined two Jews from the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, in establishing Rishon le-Zion, a settlement funded by the wealthy Jewish philanthropist, Baron de Rothschild. After a short time, however, the Bilu'im left Rishon le-Zion, driven out by its failure to meet their idealistic standards of a Jewish community as well as the rejection they endured at the hands of the Orthodox members of the settlement. In November, 1884, the nine remaining members managed to establish the settlement of Gadera.

By this point, other Jewish settlements had sprung up in Palestine. Back in Europe, Leo Pinsker had become the unofficial leader of Hovevei Zion, and Jews who were members of Hovevei Zion societies were immigrating to Palestine. Most of these Jews had used bribes to enter the country illegally and rather than sharing the communal aspirations of the Bilu'im they possessed a decisive middle-class individuality. The colonies they established all received economic backing from Baron de Rothschild who had taken an interest in these nationalist yet individualistic colonies. Between 1884 and 1900, Rothschild spent six million dollars on land, infrastructure, and

training for these colonists. Since he footed their bills he also determined how they ran their colonies.<sup>29</sup> Sending experts to determine what each colony produced, Rothschild continued to subsidize the colonies which ultimately destroyed the motivation and morale of the colonists. Rothschild, who never professed any nationalist sentiments, preferred to create settlements for “simple, uneducated, unpretentious, [illiterate] farmers” who could easily be directed by his overseers.<sup>30</sup> He wanted Jewish settlements to be centered on the production of luxury goods, particularly wine, rather than on grains or any other practical food crops. By the mid-1880’s, most of the nationalist spirit that had permeated the Hovevei Zion had been replaced by a reliance on Rothschild’s money. He supplanted all self-governing institutions with his overseers, creating “custodial regimes”.<sup>31</sup> In 1887, a small group who attempted to resist Rothschild’s officials was roundly condemned not only by the Hovevei Zion Odessa Committee, but also by other notable nationalists such as Ahad Ha’am.<sup>32</sup> At first, the Bilu’im at Gadera refused to accept Rothschild’s support, but after nearly starving to death due to lack of agricultural expertise, they abandoned the settlement to the money and control of Rothschild.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time that the Jewish colonists of the first Aliya were experiencing the negative side of Rothschild’s philanthropy, the Palestinians also began to feel the effects of colonization. Under the Ottomans, Palestine had existed as a series of provinces ruled over by sheikhs who collected tribute for the Ottomans from the peasantry, called fellaheen.<sup>34</sup> After coming under Egyptian control in the 1830’s, the Palestinians suffered under Ibrahim Pasha’s harsh rule and in 1834, a revolt broke out, “uniting dispersed Bedouins, rural sheikhs, urban notables, mountain fellaheen, and Jerusalem religious figures against a common enemy. It was these groups who would later constitute the Palestinian people.”<sup>35</sup>

Following the eviction of the Egyptians by the Ottomans along with English assistance, the Ottomans instituted a series of changes as a part of the Tanzimat reforms. Power shifted from the rural sheikhs to urban notables through whom the Ottomans exerted more control over Palestine. In addition, the Ottomans changed the basis for land ownership from one based on cultivation to one based on a central land registry, thereby allowing unoccupied land to be owned.<sup>36</sup> Spurred on by Ottoman land sale campaigns (to raise revenue for the state) as well as the introduction of Palestine to the world market, urban notables and coastal bourgeoisie began speculating in land.<sup>37</sup> By the twentieth century, most land resided in the hands of a few hundred land-lords while the fellaheen, who made up the majority of Palestinian population, ended up with only about eleven acres per family. Excessive moneylending rates (often as high as 35%), pushed the fellaheen into debt, causing them to become sharecroppers or tenant farmers.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, a new ruling class of “merchants, tax-farming urban notables, religious functionaries, and urbanized landowners” had emerged, “based principally on the expropriation of the rural surplus (from peasants who had been disarmed, left indebted, and abandoned by their traditional rural leaders).”<sup>39</sup> Into this already divided society, the first Jewish settlers began to arrive in 1882. At this point, the population of Palestine numbered 468,089, of which only about fifteen thousand were Jews and another forty-four thousand who were Christians.<sup>40</sup> The original Jewish population, the Old Yishuv, as a largely mendicant community, posed little threat to either Muslim or Christian Arabs. As the first Aliya gathered momentum, and Jewish immigrants began settling in colonies rather than in cities, the increased demand for land caused prices to rise. The fellaheen, lacking the funds to purchase land at these new prices only continued to lose hold over what little they still privately owned. In addition, many Jews began hiring Arabs as laborers or tenant farmers, paying very low wages that did little to change their economic or societal position. The Arabs not hired were displaced by Jewish purchases.<sup>42</sup> The Jewish colonists, unlike the Old Yishuv, viewed the Arab as an inferior foreigner, despite the obvious fact that the Jews, not the Arabs, were the foreigners.<sup>43</sup> Referring to the Arabs as “a people similar to a donkey”, Jewish colonists tended to apply the whip for the most insignificant infractions, thereby inspiring the fellaheen to resist in events that were branded as pogroms by Jewish media.<sup>44</sup> Persistent stereotyping of Arabs as either “boorish, backward, and uncivilized” or “scheming and cunning...men that could not be trusted,” only widened the gap between the Jews who imagined themselves the masters, and their Arab “servants”.<sup>45</sup> It should come as no surprise then that some Arabs occasionally responded to the violence of their Jewish employers with similar violence.<sup>46</sup> As Jewish settlers arrived, they did bring with them new technology and agricultural practices but the only Arabs benefited by them were the wealthy coastal Arabs who could afford the cost of new technology.<sup>47</sup> The fellaheen remained disadvantaged and repressed and although there was scattered resistance to Jewish colonization, no Arab nationalist movement existed to unite them.

The most significant opposition to Jewish colonization in the First Aliya actually came from the Jews themselves in the form of the writings of Ahad Ha’am, the pseudonym of Asher Ginsberg meaning “One of the people”. His first essay, “*Lo She Ha-Derekh*” (This is not the way) published in 1889 in the Jewish periodical *Ha-Melitz*, pointedly criticized the entire Jewish national movement.<sup>48</sup> Ha’am believed that a national revival of Judaism was necessary before any thoughts about settlement should be entertained. Palestine itself should serve as “an intellectual and cultural center” for Judaism rather than “a place for assembling masses of people.”<sup>49</sup> Ahad Ha’am also exhibited

a serious concern for the effect of Jewish immigration on the Palestinians themselves. On a visit to Palestine, he remarked that the Jewish colonists acted with “hostility and cruelty, trespass unjustly upon their boundaries, beat them shamefully without reason and even brag about it, and nobody stands to check this contemptible and dangerous tendency.”<sup>50</sup> He diagnosed this antagonism as a symptom of Jewish anger against the Palestinians who inhabited the land they consistently described as desolate and forsaken, waiting for Jewish settlers to revitalize it.

Until this point, Jewish nationalism drew most of its support from Russian Jews disillusioned by tsarist oppression. The 1890’s saw the resurgence of Jewish nationalism in Eastern Europe with the emergence of Nathan Birnbaum, a socialist Viennese Jewish writer who attempted to fuse Pinsker’s practical nationalism and Ha’am’s cultural nationalism. He agreed with Pinsker that the Jews needed a physical homeland to establish their legitimacy with the rest of the world, while acknowledging Ha’am’s opinion that a cultural homeland was as important as a political home. Publishing his ideas in his periodical *Selbstemanzipation*, in 1890 he created the term *Zionismus*—or Zionism—a translation of the Hebrew notion of *hibat Zion* (love of Zion). In 1892 he published an article further explaining and interpreting the concept.<sup>52</sup> Although Birnbaum recognized the political aspect of Zionism, he also realized how Jewish history and culture defined and influenced the movement. He knew that the Jews would only settle for one location, declaring that “[Land] need not be looked for; everyone knows it, and there is no other that could be considered. And that is why the national Jewish party, which also calls itself the Zionist party, has really decided in favor of this land, Palestine.”<sup>53</sup> Despite his consolidation of and contribution to Zionism, Birnbaum never became an influential leader in the movement. Isolated and intellectually unstable, he ended up drifting away from both Zionism and socialism to embrace the ultra-orthodox and anti-Zionist group Agudat Israel.

By the 1890’s, Zionism had begun to stagnate with only a small number of supporters in Eastern Europe and Rothschild’s control repressing it in Palestine. All of this changed in 1896 when Theodor Herzl published a small pamphlet titled *Der Judenstaat*, created the World Zionist Organization at the first Zionist Congress, and emerged as the first real leader of the movement. Herzl’s entire life story is a perfect reflection of the progression of Zionism as a whole. Beginning life as an assimilated, upper-class intellectual Jew, Herzl enjoyed a career as a popular journalist and a writer of mediocre plays. Born in 1860 in Budapest to Reformed Jewish parents, “he was taught devoutly to cherish the opportunities of Hapsburg citizenship.”<sup>54</sup> Receiving his doctorate in jurisprudence from the University of Vienna, he soon abandoned law for literary pursuits, writing essays and plays and holding various editorial positions before being sent to Paris, in 1891, by Austria’s leading newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*. Prior to this change, Herzl had held to the fashionable, liberal opinion of Jewish academia that anti-Semitism would gradually disappear, even going so far as to express an aversion for non-assimilated Jews. After the suicide of his friend Heinrich Kana, however, he lost some of this optimism.

As nationalist anti-Semitism continued to grow, he began to address it in his articles, writing that “the ghetto...had bred in [the Jews] certain asocial qualities; the Jews had come to embody the characteristics of men who had served long prison terms unjustly. Emancipation had been based on the illusion that men are made free when their rights are guaranteed on paper. The Jews had been liberated from the ghetto but basically, in their mental make-up, they had remained ghetto Jews.”<sup>55</sup> He entertained many different, usually radical, solutions, as his ideas developed during his time in Paris. The turning point occurred in 1895 when he witnessed the sentence and public degrading of the innocent Jewish captain Dreyfus, an event that catapulted him from popular journalist to an impassioned idealist leading an international nationalist movement.

He began developing his solution to the Jewish problem in June 1895 when he met with the Jewish philanthropist Baron von Hirsch. Already envisioning himself as the leader of the Jews, he criticized the philanthropic methods employed by Hirsch and Rothschild, pointing out that such methods only created mendicants not the individuals needed to make a powerful Jewish nation. To the baron, Herzl’s ideas seemed the absurd and romantic ravings of a man not entirely sane. Herzl’s diary seems to confirm Hirsch’s views as it reveals the mind of a man burning with a fire that no amount of cold reality could quench. Writing to Hirsch, he argued that Zionism must be a national movement, not a philanthropic one. He believed that only a national movement with its accompanying propaganda, infrastructure, institutions, and patriotic symbols, could properly motivate a people into action, writing that “Men live and die for a flag; it is indeed the only thing for which they are willing to die in masses, provided one educates them to it. Believe me, the policy of an entire people – especially one that is scattered all over the world – can only be made out of imponderables that float high in the thin air.”<sup>56</sup>

Hirsch’s rejection of Herzl’s plans only sent him into a frenzy of writing and study as he consolidated his ideas and created his plans. Herzl was an idealist almost disconnected from reality, yet paradoxically he brought a stern practicality to Zionism, that “did not lead him to a romantic transfiguration or defiant excess but to an altogether realistic, unromantic view of the Jewish question, one that might almost be called an anti-romantic one.”<sup>57</sup> His plan to create a Jewish nation, as opposed to the slow, intermittent establishment of Jewish colonies was an almost impossible scheme yet he threw himself into the mammoth task of turning Zionism from a fringe movement into the

life-force of the Jewish people, remarking in his diary that “the faintheartedness of the people...gives me all the more reason for action.”<sup>58</sup> In an address to the Rothschild’s he promised to “lead [our people] to the Promised Land. Do not think this is a fantasy. I am no architect of castles in the air. I build a real house, with materials you can see, touch, examine. Here are the blue-prints.”<sup>59</sup> His diary during 1885 is a collection of these “blue-prints”, various thoughts and ideas jotted down to create this house. After consulting with his friend and future Zionist collaborator, Max Nordau, and travelling to London to meet with the influential Israel Zangwill, he returned to Vienna where he put the finishing touches on his ideas, producing the essay *Der Judenstaat*.

In his two-part essay, Herzl laid out his arguments for the failure of emancipation and philanthropic Zionism, the necessity for a national movement, and his plans for infrastructure that could support the creation of a Jewish state. “We are a people—one people” he declared in the preface, and as long as the Jews remained in that state, “we shall not be left in peace”.<sup>60</sup> Like Hess and Pinsker before him, he asserted that emancipation had failed to drive out the anti-Semitism that pervaded European society: “Old prejudices against us still lie deep in the hearts of the people. He who would have proofs of this need only listen to the people where they speak with frankness and simplicity: proverb and fairy-tale are both Anti-Semitic.”<sup>61</sup> Philanthropic efforts to remedy to the situation of the Jews could never succeed because the Jewish problem was neither social nor religious, but national and thus the solution “cannot be achieved by establishing individual areas of settlement but only by concentrating in a territory” the Jewish people.<sup>62</sup>

The majority of *Der Judenstaat* is spent laying out Herzl’s plan to create “The Society of Jews” and the “Jewish Company”, two institutions that would support the migration of the Jews to their new home. He intended the Society of Jews to act as legal representative while the company would provide financial backing garnered from the support of the wealthy Jews. In addition, he laid out the framework for the society he envisioned in the Jewish states, one based on “private property, which is the economic basis of independence.”<sup>63</sup> He believed that for the Jewish Society to be powerful, it must be based on labor, writing that “Beggars will not be endured. Whoever refuses to do anything as a free man will be sent to the workhouse.”<sup>64</sup> Society must revolve around “the moral salvation of work” where every member of the state made some contribution, no matter how inferior or insignificant.<sup>65</sup>

At first, Herzl did not have a particular location set for this territory. In a short essay published a month before the release of *Der Judenstaat*, he listed the advantages of both Argentina and Palestine, remarking that while Argentina was “one of the most fertile countries in the world”, Palestine, as “our ever-memorable historic home...would attract our people with a force of extraordinary potency.”<sup>66</sup> However, he soon latched onto Palestine as the only possible location for a Jewish state and in June 1896, he traveled to Constantinople to enter into communication with the Sultan.

In his first trip to the Middle East, Herzl seems to have left behind his signature practicality. Indeed, from the moment he mentioned Palestine as a possible location for the Jewish state, he began to display an ignorance derivative of typical European assumptions about the Middle East. In his essay published earlier that year, he had declared that a Jewish state in Palestine would “form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism”, a belief that would later on form one of the key Zionist talking-points designed to gain British support.<sup>67</sup> Just as the Bilu’im had been unaware of the difficulties besetting the Ottomans over a decade earlier, Herzl was entirely oblivious to the Sultan’s dislike of nationalism. For a while, now, the Ottomans had been dealing with a number of nationalist movements, including trouble in the Balkans as well as the emergence of Turkish nationalism that would eventually coalesce into the Young Turks. The Sultan had no interest in creating another problem for the Ottomans, especially one potentially backed by Europe. Herzl expressed a hope in *Der Judenstaat* that the Sultan would grant him Palestine in exchange for the Jews “[regulating] the whole finances of Turkey”.<sup>68</sup> The Sultan was uninterested, however, telling Herzl’s aide, Philipp Michael de Nevlinski, “If Mr. Herzl is as much your friend as you are mine, then advise him not to take another step in this matter. I cannot sell even a foot of land...The Turkish Empire belongs not to me, but to the Turkish people. I cannot give away any part of it. Let the Jews save their billions. When my Empire is partitioned, they may get Palestine for nothing. But only our corpse will be divided. I will not agree to vivisection.”<sup>69</sup>

During this first visit to Constantinople, Herzl never had the opportunity of directly meeting with the Sultan so he never received a definite rejection of his plan. Instead, the Sultan requested him to use his influence in Europe to “to help in the Armenian business...[and] obtain for [the Sultan] a loan...[of] two million pounds.”<sup>70</sup> Despite never receiving the audience he hoped for, Herzl remained optimistic, as did Nevlinski through whom the Sultan communicated with Herzl. The more Nevlinski communicated with the Sultan, the more he became “convinced that the Turks are willing to give us Palestine” despite what the Sultan had originally told him.<sup>71</sup>

Herzl returned to Europe to prepare for the first Zionist Congress, hopeful that his book would galvanize the wealthy, upper class Jews of Western Europe into action. His middle class reader base that he had cultivated through his work in *Neue Freie Presse* reacted with astonishment that their favorite journalist had suddenly become an

ideologue. Stefan Zweig reported that they wondered ““what had happened...to this otherwise intelligent, witty, and cultivated writer? What foolishness is this that he has thought up and writes about? Why should we go to Palestine? Our language is German and not Hebrew, and beautiful Austria is our homeland.””<sup>72</sup> Many of the western Rabbis, such as Rabbi Gudemann, also rejected Herzl along with Zionism. A meeting with Baron Edmond de Rothschild ended with a curt refusal to “undertake such a responsibility” and Herzl describing Rothschild as “a decent, good-natured, faint-hearted man, who utterly fails to understand the matter and who would like to call it off as a coward tries to call of an imperative surgical operation.”<sup>73</sup> Rothschild, however, had other reasons for rejecting Herzl’s plans, pointing out that ““A mass migration of Jews would arouse the enmity of the Bedouin, the mistrust of the Turkish authorities, the jealousy of the Christian colonies and pilgrims, and would undoubtedly lead to the suppression of the established settlements.””<sup>74</sup>

Yet a few Western Jews became inspired by *Der Judenstaat*, such as David Wolffsohn, who went to Vienna upon its publication to meet with Herzl and introduce him to Pinsker and Hess’s writings. He also attracted the attention of the British millennialist Reverend William Hechler, the chaplain at the British Embassy in Vienna who believed Herzl “was indeed the prophet sent by God ‘to fulfill prophecy.’”<sup>75</sup> Hechler provided Herzl with access to the Grand Duke of Baden, the uncle of the German Kaiser who came to support the notion of a Jewish state.

Despite this limited support, Herzl’s popularity at this time remained minimal in Western Europe, causing him to rethink his original belief that wealthy Western Jews would fund his enterprise. Eastern Europe received Herzl in an entirely different manner. To this mass of impoverished Jews living under the thumb of the tsar, Herzl was the messiah. The first prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, at the time a child living in Poland, recounts the rumor that ““the Messiah had arrived, a tall, handsome man, a learned man of Vienna.””<sup>76</sup> Unlike the emancipated middle class in the West, these Jews did not possess the luxury of dismissing the plan presented in *Der Judenstaat*. Herzl was aware of these opinions held about him, and despite his belief that he was the leader of Zionism, he was careful to “never allow any trace of Messianism or mysticism of any kind to appear in his public statements...an Austrian Jewish friend [warned him to not] ‘come forward in the role of Messiah.’”<sup>77</sup>

Eastern European intellectuals also found a certain appeal in Herzl’s book.<sup>78</sup> Some, however, feared Herzl’s effect on the masses and a number of the Hovevei Zion leaders were upset that he had taken their ideas and become a Messiah to the people. These young Russian and Polish Zionists were soon forced to act rather than remain in a state of intellectual limbo over this new leader. In March 1897, Herzl called the first Zionist congress in Switzerland, obliging Jews to come to a decision whether to support him or not, as well as creating the phenomenon necessary to catalyze the movement into action.

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1897, the Congress, opened at the Basel Municipal Casino. Most of those who attended were Hovevei Zion members or young students who would have been assimilationists before 1881. Herzl had carefully designed the affair with a mind towards dignity, requiring attendees to come attired in frock coats and white ties, displaying a modern Zionist flag, and ensuring the presence of correspondents from Europe’s leading newspapers in the gallery already packed with visitors, both Jewish and Christian. Herzl purposely remained out of the focus of the convention only delivering a short address in which he described Zionism as ““a civilized, law-abiding, humane movement towards the ancient goal of our people.””<sup>79</sup> His friend Max Nordau captured the attention of the attendees with his analysis of the Jews as ““a race whose abilities...degenerate in intellectual and physical misery.””<sup>80</sup> After hearing from representatives from various countries, the congress established a program for the future of Zionism. Upon creating these goals, the Congress established the Zionist Organization, the “Jewish Society” of Herzl’s *Judenstaat* and appointed a number of representatives to its executive branch, the General Council.

### 3. Conclusion

The first Zionist Congress marked the ending of a long period of development toward a consolidated Jewish nationalism. For the first time, Zionism, in Theodor Herzl, had a leader with the ability necessary to create a political movement with a significant backing. Prior to Herzl and *Der Judenstaat*, every Jewish nationalist before him had failed to gather anything more than a minor following. Yet the period of development between Moses Hess and Theodor Herzl set many patterns of thought and action that would characterize Zionism all the way through to the creation of Israel in 1948. Divergent political groups had already begun to emerge within Zionism, particularly between the young socialist, revolutionary Jews of Eastern Europe and the western, middle class Jews, such as Herzl, who favored private property. In addition, Jewish settlements in Palestine and dealings with the Arabs portended the future hostilities and tragedies of Arab-Israeli interactions. Ottoman officials and Arab intellectuals early on recognized the potential conflict inherent in the Jewish push for a homeland. The first Zionist Congress also witnessed the divergence of political and cultural Zionism, with the former believing firmly that only a state for the

Jews could solve their problems and the latter rejecting that premise in favor of a culturally regenerative movement. Although it would still be fifty years before Zionism succeeded in establishing a Jewish State in Palestine, the movement had been irrevocably set in motion.

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