

*The Finest Feats of the War? The Captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem during the First World War and Public Opinion throughout the British Empire* (Dr. Justin Fantauzzo, Assistant Professor, Memorial University of Newfoundland, [jfantauzzo@mun.ca](mailto:jfantauzzo@mun.ca))

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### *Introduction*

Addressing the House of Commons on 20 December 1917, less than two weeks after the fall of Jerusalem, Prime Minister David Lloyd George implored his fellow Parliamentarians to contemplate the importance of the British Empire's Middle Eastern victories:

The British Empire owes a great deal to side-shows. I have no doubt at all that, when the history of 1917 comes to be written, and comes to be read, ages hence, these events in Mesopotamia and Palestine will hold a much more conspicuous place in the minds and the memories of people than many an event which looms much larger for the moment in our sight.<sup>1</sup>

At the time, the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force's (MEF) victory at Baghdad in March and the Egyptian Expeditionary Force's (EEF) capture of Jerusalem were rare bright spots in a year of dismal failures that included the unsuccessful Nivelle and Kerensky Offensives, Bolshevik revolt in Russia, the Italian collapse at Caporetto, and stalemate at Ypres. Nonetheless, Lloyd George's speech hinted that neither the success in Mesopotamia nor in Palestine had been given their proper due. The war's periphery in the Middle East, he claimed, was like the British victory over French settlers in Quebec during the Seven Years' War. Initially, it would struggle to gain the public's attention. But in time it would become more important than the bigger battles fought across Continental Europe. Perhaps Lloyd George saw a parallel in Britain's consolidation of its North American position in the eighteenth century and the emergence of an imperial outpost in the eastern Mediterranean in the twentieth. Or maybe he was simply trying to vindicate his

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<sup>1</sup> Hansard, House of Commons Debates (HC), 5th series, C, cols 2211-12, 20 December 1917.

support for an indirect, eastern war strategy.<sup>2</sup> Either way his message was clear: the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem mattered, and they alone should come to define the war effort in 1917.

With Lloyd George's prophecy in mind, this article considers the reactions of the British and Dominion press, politicians, as well as a limited number of the public to the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem. Both cities were steeped in Biblical and Oriental lore and both were discussed mostly as liberations of oppressed peoples from Ottoman tyranny. But was the capture of either city seen as a booster shot to imperial prestige in the Arab-Islamic world, so badly damaged by the failed invasion of Gallipoli and Major General Sir Charles Townshend's surrender at Kut al-Amara? Were Baghdad and Jerusalem thought of as important steps toward Allied victory? If not, were they seen as worthy 'territorial spoils' for a battered and bruised imperial public?<sup>3</sup> And, finally, how did the press and public envision British rule in post-war Mesopotamia and Palestine?

This article argues that the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem walked a fine line between being historic political events in the Empire's history, maybe even as the pinnacle of its expansion, and needless diversions from the Western Front. Moreover, when the press and public considered the post-war Middle East, what emerged throughout was a common thread of the Empire as a modernizing world force that promoted progress, civilisation, and industry.<sup>4</sup>

Although an ever-growing number of scholars have focused on the First World War Middle East, few have addressed these questions. Matthew Hughes' pioneering study of British war strategy in Palestine was the first to deal, albeit briefly, with the propagandistic value of Jerusalem's capture. He rightly argues that no other Levantine cities except Jerusalem had the same name value for an at least nominally Christian Britain.<sup>5</sup> Still, Jerusalem's capture, Hughes contends, failed to harness the public's enthusiasm as much as was hoped due to the publication

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<sup>2</sup> See Brock Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy 1916-1918* (London, Frank Cass, 2001), Chapter 5; David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1986); Chapter 2; David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (London, Associated University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> French, *British Strategy*, p.82.

<sup>4</sup> For another example of the press as an advocate of empire, see Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, 1880-1922* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East 1917-1919* (London, Frank Cass, 1999), pp.41-2. For Christianity's place in early-twentieth-century Britain, see Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2009 [2001]).

of the Marquess of Lansdowne's peace offer to Germany in the *Daily Telegraph* on 29 November and the explosion of the munitions-laden SS *Mont-Blanc* at Halifax, Nova Scotia on 6 December.<sup>6</sup> Yet neither Lansdowne's peace overture nor the devastation of urban Halifax, as will be made clear throughout this article, blunted press coverage on or debate about Jerusalem.

Hughes' point about Jerusalem's special place in Anglo-Protestant society has been the main point of entry for historians interested in First World War Jerusalem. Both Eitan Bar-Yosef and James E. Kitchen have considered Jerusalem's capture as part of a British and Dominion soldier discourse about the campaign as a twentieth-century crusade. Similarly, Stefan Goebel has highlighted the re-emergence of medievalism and crusading rhetoric in Britain and Germany, applied not only to the Middle East and Gallipoli but also to the wars on the Western and Eastern Fronts. For their part, Bar-Yosef and Kitchen have also concluded that soldiers were bitterly disappointed by the tawdriness of early twentieth-century Jerusalem. The marked difference between the austerity of Anglo-Protestant worship and the off-putting iconography of Eastern Orthodoxy was a frequent criticism. As far as press and popular representations of Jerusalem's capture are concerned, all three have looked only at the coverage of a select number of Britain's national newspapers – the Fleet Street press – and their treatment of General Edmund Allenby's entry into Jerusalem on 11 December. Bernard Partridge's cartoon in *Punch* that connected the EEF's war to Richard the Lionheart's Third Crusade has also been considered.<sup>7</sup> Others have explored the interfaith struggle for control of Christian holy sites during the war, and civil unrest in Jerusalem caused by starvation, disease, and political agitation.<sup>8</sup>

Baghdad has been covered less generously than Jerusalem. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen's impressive *The First World War in the Middle East* suggests that Baghdad's capture was hailed

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Hughes, 'Command, Strategy and the Battle for Palestine, 1917', in Ian W. Beckett, ed., *1917: Beyond the Western Front* (Leiden, Brill, 2009), p.123.

<sup>7</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005), Chapter 5; Kitchen does note the appearance of a cartoon in the *Northampton Independent* that featured a modern British infantryman shaking hands with a medieval crusader, but this image was published in April 1917, long before Jerusalem's capture, James E. Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East: Morale and Military Identity in the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns, 1916-18* (London, Bloomsbury, 2014), Chapter 2; Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.114-26.

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Mazza, 'Churches at War: The Impact of the First World War on the Christian Institutions of Jerusalem, 1914-20', *Middle Eastern Studies*, XLV (2009): pp.207-27; Abigail Jacobson, 'A City Living Through Crisis: Jerusalem during World War I', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, XXXVI (2009): pp.73-92.

as a ‘dazzling political triumph’, and an antidote of sorts to British war weariness. But like Jerusalem’s capture it was acclaimed solely for its political importance.<sup>9</sup> We also know that Britons serving in Mesopotamia during the war found little at all, whether political, military, or strategic, of value in Baghdad’s capture. Nadia Atia’s work on Mesopotamia, like Bar-Yosef’s and Kitchen’s on Palestine, has shown that soldiers and nurses were typically disenchanted by Baghdad’s shabby state.<sup>10</sup>

By examining nearly one hundred newspapers published throughout England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Canada, as well as a number of House of Commons debates, this article allows us to put a hand on the pulse of public opinion about Baghdad and Jerusalem as best we can. We cannot, of course, know what most average, working-class Britons or New Zealanders thought. But we can understand how public opinion makers were shaping the war in the Middle East and how they thought Baghdad and Jerusalem *should* be seen. None of this is to say that newspapers are a problem-free source. Censorship, propaganda, class, political affiliation, editorial influence, and commercial pressures must be kept in mind.<sup>11</sup> But to ignore newspapers would be to bypass a source of information that reached a truly mass audience.

Newspaper circulation during the war years grew by leaps and bounds. In Britain, the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Sketch* reached around one million readers annually between 1914 and 1918. The *Daily Express*’s circulation almost doubled. Former Liberal MP Horatio Bottomley’s Conservative weekly magazine, *John Bull*, sold nearly two million copies by the end of 1918.<sup>12</sup> Although exact statistics are hard to come by, the provincial press had a combined circulation that surpassed all of the nationals put together until the mid-nineteen

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<sup>9</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (London, Hurst and Company, 2014), p.97, p.112 & p.142.

<sup>10</sup> Nadia Atia, ‘A Wartime Tourist Trail: Mesopotamia in the British Imagination, 1914-1918’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, XVI (2012): pp.403-14.

<sup>11</sup> See Ross McKibbin’s discussion on newspaper readership, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.503-8.

<sup>12</sup> John M. McEwen, ‘The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation’, *Journal of Contemporary History* XVII (1982), pp.459-86; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London, Penguin, 1999 [1998]), pp.243-4.

twenties.<sup>13</sup> Newspaper circulation in the Dominions was naturally smaller but likewise increased considerably between the late nineteenth century and the First World War. The Conservative *Sydney Morning Herald* and Melbourne-based *Argus*, for example, claimed readerships in excess of 100,000 by 1914, while Toronto's major dailies had a combined circulation of around 433,000 by 1914.<sup>14</sup>

The First World War has already proven to be fertile ground for studies of the press. Stephen Badsey has shown how poor and often deliberately uninformative press coverage of the Western Front in 1918 may have produced a kind of social amnesia in Britain that 'undervalued' the Empire's part in defeating Germany.<sup>15</sup> Richard S. Grayson's *Belfast Boys* uses newspapers in his effort to reveal public opinion amongst Nationalist and Unionist communities during the war. He has since argued for the use of newspapers by historians as part of a broader movement for 'military history from the street'.<sup>16</sup> Catriona Pennell's *A Kingdom United* places newspapers at the heart of her full-length study of public opinion in Britain and Ireland to the outbreak of war. She uses newspapers alongside diaries and correspondence as a window into public opinion. Crucially, as Pennell shows, the press and public opinion often mirrored each other. For example, in the lead-up to Britain's declaration of war against Germany, the Liberal and Unionist provincial press's position of neutrality reflected the public's own hope for a peaceful resolution.<sup>17</sup> Much like Adrian Gregory's use of newspapers in his revisionist work on British war enthusiasm, Pennell's study also demonstrates how newspapers reveal actions.<sup>18</sup> Public

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<sup>13</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), p.16.

<sup>14</sup> *North Otago Times*, 3 August 1914, p.3; Simon J. Potter, 'Communications and Integration: The British and Dominions Press and the British World, c.1867-1914', in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London, Frank Cass, 2003), pp.188; Ian Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002), p.9.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Badsey, "'The Missing Western Front': British Politics, Strategy, and Propaganda in 1918", in Mark Connelly and David Welch, eds, *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003* (London, Routledge, 2005), pp.47-64; For the victory that wasn't, see Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, Review, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Richard S. Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War* (London, Continuum, 2009), Richard S. Grayson, 'Military History from the Street: New Methods for Researching First World War Service in the British Military', *War in History*, XXI (2014), pp.465-95.

<sup>17</sup> Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm" in 1914: A Reassessment', in Gaily Braybon, ed., *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford, Berghahn, 2003), pp.67-85; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 1.

demonstrations, speeches, and even House of Commons debates were regularly printed in the national and provincial press, giving us insight into both what was being said and what was being done.<sup>19</sup>

This article, then, supports Pennell's claim that the press was more than a mouthpiece for government propaganda, spewing pre-approved one-liners and regurgitating press releases from Whitehall.<sup>20</sup> Both the public and the press interpreted Baghdad and Jerusalem in a number of ways, and not just as the culmination of the medieval crusades, as in the case of Palestine, or a romantic sideshow in the land of the Arabian Nights, as in the case of Mesopotamia.

### *Political Prestige*

Since the Indian Mutiny of 1857 British rule in the Middle East and India, as David French has written, rested on a delicate balance of 'prestige and bluff'. Governing hundreds of millions of colonial peoples with limited manpower and finite resources, Britain could not rely solely upon its military might to prevent civil unrest. To this end British policy in the Middle East and India was designed to impress upon colonial subjects the distinct advantages of British colonialism.

British rule, however, did not go unchallenged. The spread of pan-Islamism throughout the Muslim world in the late nineteenth century was considered by many politicians and colonial administrators to be the biggest threat to Anglo-Saxon superiority. The Mahdist Revolt of 1881 to 1899, in particular, amply demonstrated the dangerous fusion of anti-colonial politics and pan-Islamist ideology. The looming spectre of a pan-Islamic backlash in Egypt and India and the corresponding need to placate Muslim opinion helped shape British relations with the Ottoman Empire. Until the outbreak of war with Constantinople on 5 November 1914, Britain had done all it could to keep the 'sick man of Europe' alive. Without compromising its own regional interests, of course, Britain generally acted to check German and Russian influence and uphold the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity.

Concern for Muslim opinion throughout the British Empire continued well into the war years. It is with British prestige and the subversive potential of radical pan-Islamism in mind that

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<sup>19</sup> Pennell, *Kingdom United*, p.25.

<sup>20</sup> Pennell, *Kingdom United*, p.4.

Gallipoli and Kut al-Amara must first be considered, and henceforth the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem. Naturally, the safety and security of India was the primary concern. Viceroy of India Lord Hardinge believed that any disaster in Mesopotamia might lead to a pan-Islamic insurgency by Persian and Afghan tribes along India's borders. Furthermore, at the outbreak of the war over one third of the Indian Army comprised Muslims. Colonial administrators in Egypt also worried about a marriage between nationalist politics and pan-Islamic ideas, particularly the effect such a union might have on the loyalty of Egyptian soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

For an imperial public expecting victories against the Central Powers' weak link, Gallipoli and Kut al-Amara were utterly disastrous. The Special Commissions Act of 1916, which established the Mesopotamia and Dardanelles Commissions of Inquiry, confirmed public suspicion that government administrators had botched the campaigns. The Mesopotamia Commission's findings, in particular, were released to the public on 27 June 1917. The press called it 'one of the most distressing documents ever submitted to Parliament.'<sup>22</sup> The two setbacks were further worsened by the Ottoman Army's poor reputation. The Balkan Wars between 1912 and 1913 had revealed its shortcomings as a competent fighting force. Notwithstanding widespread reforms between 1913 and 1914, the Ottoman Army's poor performances early in the war at Sarikamish and the Suez Canal did little to salvage its public standing.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Townshend's capitulation at Kut al-Amara was almost unprecedented. Although the British Army had a relatively recent and alarming history of military engagements in colonial wars, namely at Isandlwana, Khartoum, Mafeking, and Ladysmith, it had either gone down in defeat or persevered and won.<sup>24</sup> Kut al-Amara, in stark contrast, was the largest surrender of British arms since Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, and would not be matched until Arthur Percival's Malaya Command in Singapore was overrun by Japan in 1942.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> David French, 'The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-16', *War and Society*, V (1987): pp.45-61.

<sup>22</sup> Paul K. Davis, *Ends and Means: The British Mesopotamian Campaign and Commission* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), pp.126-8; *The Times*, 27 June 1917, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.6.

<sup>24</sup> Cecil D. Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Durham, N.C., Durham University Press, 1988), pp.4-8.

<sup>25</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army*, p.61.

Consequently, Baghdad and Jerusalem were first and foremost seen as political victories that atoned for Gallipoli and Kut al-Amara. The *Bucks Herald* wrote that Baghdad ‘compensates for the misfortune at Kut-el-Amara, and completely restores the prestige to our arms which was then lost’.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the two victories had destroyed Germany’s plans for a *Mittel Europa* that stretched from Berlin to Baghdad and dangerously close to India’s borders. Cardiff’s *Western Mail* satirized Baghdad’s fall with a cartoon that pictured an incredulous Kaiser Wilhelm alongside a caricatured Sultan Mehmet VI, staring with disbelief at the Union Jack flying above Baghdad. Clenched in the Kaiser’s hand was the plan for the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, while the scheme for the ‘Germanisation of Asia’ lay scattered at his feet.<sup>27</sup> For the vehemently anti-German and Liberal Conservative *Saturday Review*, the defeat of the Turks ‘reminds us once more that the Pan-Germanists’ desired a Teutonic colony in the Middle East stretching from Constantinople to Persia, an unacceptable affront to British regional authority.<sup>28</sup> This sentiment was echoed in the Dominions. For Australia’s *Maryborough Chronicler*, *Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, Baghdad was proof that the ‘Kaiser’s Oriental pro-gramme was wrecked.’<sup>29</sup> New Zealand’s *Wairarapa Daily Times* declared Jerusalem’s capture a ‘staggering blow to Turkish prestige’, while the *Vancouver Daily Sun* opined that ‘even the most insane Pan-German’, filled with dreams of a Teutonic Empire in the Middle East, was ‘obliged to realize that this grandiose plan has gone glimmering’.<sup>30</sup>

Where Jerusalem largely differed from Baghdad was that its political importance was very often tied to its religious associations. For the Church of England the city’s capture opened up a world of possibilities. At the behest of the Archbishop of Canterbury Randall Davidson, Rennie MacInnes, Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, petitioned to have Muslim buildings and mosques that had been converted from Christian places of worship during the Muslim Conquests of the seventh to eleventh centuries restored to Christianity. MacInnes reasoned that politics and religion were inseparable to Middle Eastern and Muslim minds. In a back and forth exchange between MacInnes and Reginald Wingate, High Commissioner for Egypt, the former asserted that Western ‘magnanimity and tolerance’ was ‘regarded by the Eastern as a sign of weakness

<sup>26</sup> *Bucks Herald*, 17 March 1917, p.5.

<sup>27</sup> *Western Mail*, 13 March 1917, p.4.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Kut: And the Lure of the East’, *Saturday Review*, 10 March 1917, p.220.

<sup>29</sup> *Maryborough Chronicler*, *Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 14 March 1917, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 11 December 1917, p.4; *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 11 December 1917, p.6.



and fear'. After agreeing to conduct a feasibility study the Arab Bureau was afraid that such a move would cause irreparable damage to the Empire's reputation in the Islamic world, chiefly in India. Furthermore, it concluded that if any denomination had a claim on some of Jerusalem's oldest buildings the Orthodox and Catholic Churches were far ahead of the Church of England. The Bishopric's claim was eventually rejected.<sup>31</sup>

MacInnes, however, was not an aberration. Protestant clergymen across the British Empire reacted with the same blend of Christian pride and irredentism. Motivated by the hope that Jerusalem 'would mean an immense forward movement on the part of the Christian mission', clergymen in Edinburgh proposed to build a Scots Kirk, a Church of Scotland building, in Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> At the Empire Club of Canada in Toronto, Reverend Canon Gould lectured on 'The Imperial Significance of the Capture of Jerusalem', which he argued was to be found in the Empire's control of the three holiest territories to the Abrahamic faiths: Sinai, Jerusalem, and Mecca. Echoing MacInnes, Gould cautioned his audience not to underestimate the power of religion in the East, for there 'religion is external; it represents the relationships of the man, political, social, as well as religious'.<sup>33</sup> Dean of Manchester JEC Welldon, formerly the Bishop of Calcutta, took the argument even further. Although he hoped that Jerusalem would remain under British rule, he accepted that there was a strong possibility that the Balfour Declaration would come to fruition. In the event that Palestine became the new Jewish Homeland, Welldon advised that the Jews of Palestine 'will need... a controlling authority; and there is, I think, no Christian power more sincerely trusted by the Jews than Great Britain.' Beyond potentially controlling the land, Dean Fitchett of All Saints' Church in Otago spoke of how Jerusalem's capture could lead to the conversion of Palestinian Muslims. Even though he recognized that a British Palestine, like Egypt and India, would be a place of religious tolerance, he stressed that the 'best hope of winning the Moslem who was under British rule lay in the indirect influences of Christian civilisation and just government.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bar-Yosef, *Holy Land*, p.262; Kitchen, *British Imperial Army*, pp.81-2; The National Archive (TNA), Foreign Office, 882/14, Arab Bureau Papers, Rennie MacInnes to Reginald Wingate, 2 May 1917.

<sup>32</sup> *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 14 December 1917, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> Rev. Canon Gould, 'The Imperial Significance of the Capture of Jerusalem,' in *The Empire Club of Canada Addresses* (Toronto: The Empire Club of Canada, 1925), pp.60-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 17 December 1917, p.2.

*Te Deum*'s and thanksgiving services erupted across the Empire in praise of the city's capture. Many of these services were multi-faith events and not restricted to Anglicans. At St Paul's Cathedral in London, thanksgiving services for Jerusalem's capture included official representatives of the Serbian and Greek Orthodox Churches.<sup>35</sup> In Middlesbrough, All Saints' Parish Church invited 'All Christian People' to celebrate Jerusalem's deliverance 'from the hands of the infidel.'<sup>36</sup> St Mary's Parish Church in Cheltenham rang its bells for the first time since the war began.<sup>37</sup> Few had as much reason to rejoice as the modern incarnation of the Knights Hospitallers, also known as the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Formed in 1099 in the aftermath of the First Crusade, the Order was responsible for the care of Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem and the military defence of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. In January 1918, the Order paraded throughout central London carrying the banner of the Kingdom of Jerusalem to the Clerkenwell Priory, a medieval church built by Hospitallers in the twelfth century. At the Priory, Archbishop of York Cosmo Gordon Lang preached from Psalm 137 with its significant verse, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem'. He spoke of the city's capture as the 'age-long desire and hope of the old Crusaders'.<sup>38</sup> Similar events took place at the twelfth-century Temple Church in London, built by another monastic order of warrior-monks, the Knights Templar.<sup>39</sup>

In the outer reaches of the Empire, principally in the antipodean Dominions, anti-Muslim rhetoric was commonplace. In a speech at the opening of the East Coast Freezing Works in Whakatane, New Zealand, Prime Minister William Massey broke the news of Jerusalem's capture. He expected that 'the Sacred City', after thousands of years of being conquered and reconquered from Arab-Muslims, 'would remain in possession of the British nation', to which chants of 'Hear, hear' were bellowed by the crowd.<sup>40</sup> Mayor of Dunedin JJ Clark told a good-sized audience at the King Edward Picture Theatre that 'the Holy City was freed from the grip of the Moslems', a comment that received a loud applause. It was the 'greatest day our Empire had seen', he continued, and it was 'wonderful that in this new crusade men from the uttermost parts

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<sup>35</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> *North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (Middlesbrough, England), 12 December 1917, p.1.

<sup>37</sup> *The Looker-On*, 15 December 1917, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1918, p.4.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 15 December 1917, p.9.

<sup>40</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 12 December 1917, p.4.

of the earth should be there to take part in what was the aim of the knights of old.’<sup>41</sup> The New Zealand press joined in, with the *Wellington Times* describing Baghdad as the ‘capital of the great Saracen Empire before the Moslem hordes deluged Europe’<sup>42</sup>

Still, the Empire’s reputation in the Arab-Islamic world was a serious concern. The Liberal *Westminster Gazette* assured its readers that it ‘must make a profound impression on the Moslem world that, after Baghdad, Jerusalem should have fallen into our hands.’<sup>43</sup> The *Daily Express* made the somewhat radical suggestion that Islam would turn to the British Empire as its new protector. Muslims worldwide, the *Express* claimed, had previously looked to Constantinople to safeguard Islam. But Baghdad’s fall had permanently weakened Ottoman prestige. Muslims no longer had any reason to oppose the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The capture of Baghdad proved ‘to the Oriental that the Turk can no longer be relied on to maintain the Caliphate.’<sup>44</sup> Even though ‘Germany probably did not care two pins about Jerusalem’, the Nationalist *Cork Examiner* recognized that the ‘loss of the city means the loss of the one thing which holds that Empire together, viz., Prestige.’<sup>45</sup>

Some newspapers played specifically to Shia opinion, likely done to court the Shia majorities in Mesopotamia, Persia, and along India’s northernmost border. *The Times of India* contended that life for Shia pilgrims travelling from Baghdad to Karbala would be far more comfortable under British rule.<sup>46</sup> In a *Reuters* article reprinted in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, a ‘distinguished authority on the Middle and Near East’ – possibly British Intelligence Officer Mark Sykes, who was often described in the same manner in articles for *The Times*, or someone else from Wellington House’s ‘The Turk Must Go’ campaign – noted that Shia Persians and Iraqis especially would welcome Britain’s victory ‘as an omen that Kerbela and Mejeef will soon be freed from the heavy hand of the Turk’, who had desecrated the shrines of Hussein and Ali.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 12 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>42</sup> *Wellington Times*, 15 March 1917, p.3.

<sup>43</sup> *Westminster Gazette*, 11 December 1917, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Express*, 12 March 1917, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 14 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times of India*, 13 December 1918, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 March 1917, p.5.

The fact that no mosques or holy sites in Jerusalem were damaged during the city's capture was a badge of imperial pride. The *Auckland Star* found it impossible to reconcile Germany's reasoning for abandoning Jerusalem, described in a semi-official press release as a conscious decision to avoid bloodshed in the Holy City, with its conduct in Reims and Ypres. It also failed to understand how Germany could claim to be protecting Christian holy sites while simultaneously supporting its Ottoman ally and the massacre of Christians in Anatolia and Armenia. In contrast, the *Star* pointed out, the British took both Jerusalem and Bethlehem 'without dislodging or even chipping a stone on its walls or its buildings.'<sup>48</sup>

Jerusalem's capture also impressed the Empire's Jews. The *Jewish World*, for example, boldly declared that Britain, already the world's greatest Christian and 'Mahomedan power', had by Jerusalem's capture and the Balfour Declaration made it 'the greatest Jewish Power on earth.'<sup>49</sup> Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom Joseph Herman Hertz sent a personal note of congratulations to Allenby. In Manchester, Rabbi Salomon of the Great Synagogue praised the EEF as 'the army of liberation', while Rabbi Jacob Phillips of Park Place Synagogue celebrated the 'conquest of Southern Palestine, and its promise of a restoration' as a Jewish homeland.<sup>50</sup> Even as far as Rangoon, the capital of British Burma, the small community of expatriate English Jews gathered at the city's synagogue to give thanks to Britain and Allenby.<sup>51</sup>

Yet whatever political prestige the Empire stood to gain in the Arab-Islamic and Jewish worlds it risked damaging closer to home. In a protracted House of Commons debate about shipping and food supplies, MP for South Molton George Lambert told the House, 'Supposing the inhabitants of Birmingham are hungry, it will not be very much consolation to them to know that we have taken Bagdad.' Lambert further stated that 'the military authorities are wandering around over all unexpected places,' and expressed his worry that 'they may be attacking Jerusalem next.' His main concern was that 'these wandering expeditions', as he phrased them, were draining British fields of their labour and exacerbating the food shortage.<sup>52</sup> The plight of British industry was also the rallying call for a meeting of 700 Labour Party delegates at

<sup>48</sup> *Auckland Star*, 17 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in the *Daily Express*, 12 December 1917, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 December 1917, p.6.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times of India*, 18 December 1917, p.7.

<sup>52</sup> Hansard, HC, XCI, cols.1368-74, 15 March 1917.

Westminster on 30 December 1917, led by Arthur Henderson, MP for Barnard Castle.

Henderson scolded Lloyd George's government for not negotiating a separate peace with Austria and the Ottoman Empire and instead 'taking Jerusalem by force'. He lashed out at Lloyd George for prolonging the war and robbing Britain of precious farmhands and industrial workers.<sup>53</sup> Thus, as Britain raised its flag over the cities of the east, some claimed it was neglecting the needs of its own people.

Baghdad's capture also called into question British rule in Ireland. Over two days of fiery debate in the House of Commons, MPs from the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) zeroed in on what they saw as the utter hypocrisy of Lieutenant-General Stanley Maude's proclamation to the inhabitants of Baghdad on 19 March. Maude's speech had promised self-governance for the Arabs of Mesopotamia and something of a civilisational rebirth for its peoples. In its now infamous line it assured Baghdadis that 'our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.' On 21 March, Joseph Devlin, IPP MP for Belfast West, fired the first volley at the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, Andrew Bonar Law. Was the British Government 'prepared to do immediately for Ireland what Sir Stanley Maude has been authorized to proclaim they are resolved to do for the people of Baghdad and the whole Arab race', he asked? Bonar Law skillfully dodged Devlin's question by confirming that Maude had of course been authorized to deliver the proclamation but that he could add no more on the subject. Devlin pressed the matter and asked whether or not a White Paper would be issued to all MPs. Before Law could reply, IPP MP for Donegal South JG Swift MacNeill raised the likelihood that Maude, born on Gibraltar but of Irish stock, was 'thinking of the Irish situation' when he gave his speech. Law snapped back that he hoped Maude was 'thinking of something else' when he entered Baghdad. He further reminded Devlin and MacNeill that Maude himself did not write the declaration and that the government, in any case, had approved it. Undeterred, Devlin made a final remark, 'Is it not possible that he was thinking of the cause of universal liberty for all nations?'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *The Argus* (Melbourne, Australia), 31 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>54</sup> Hansard, HC, XCI, cols.1902-4, 21 March 1917.

Bonar Law was subjected to another round of sharp questioning the following day. IPP MP for Down South Jeremiah MacVeagh tried cleverly to goad him into answering a series of questions that could have easily applied to Ireland: was the War Cabinet aware that Maude had proposed to ‘force Home Rule on the Arabs without regard to the views of such homogenous communities amongst the Arabs as may design to remain under Turkish rule’; whether ‘the Arabs have agreed amongst themselves as to the form of government they desire...and, if so, how their views have been ascertained’; and if ‘Maude’s action in preaching to the Arabs the evil results of alien rule, in promising that alien institutions will not be established amongst them, and in urging them to remain a united nation north, south, east and west’, had the support of the War Cabinet? Like the previous day Bonar Law reiterated the prime minister’s position and added nothing more. He ended his response by dismissing MacVeagh’s claim that a number of vilayets in Arabia wanted to remain part of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>55</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Irish newspapers were divided along political lines. County Cavan’s *Anglo-Celt*, owned by the nationalist O’Hanlon family, cited the Commons debate and published the full text of Maude’s proclamation under the incredulous title, ‘Freedom For --- Arabs!’ It urged all Ulstermen to read the speech.<sup>56</sup> Importantly, the *Anglo-Celt* lumped the article in with other news about Irish Home Rule, making Maude’s proclamation and Anglo-Irish politics related issues. Opposition to Devlin, MacNeill, and MacVeagh came primarily from the Unionist *Irish Times*, which censured the trio for making ‘Nationalist capital’ out of Maude’s ‘inspiring proclamation’.<sup>57</sup> It printed only select excerpts from Maude’s address, and instead of referencing Irish Home Rule it leveraged Maude’s leadership of the MEF as an example of Ireland’s contribution to the war effort. This was made clear on the *Irish Times*’s front page for 17 March, its big, bold title reading, ‘Irish General Captures Baghdad.’<sup>58</sup>

Jerusalem’s capture was less controversial but it, too, was pulled into discussions about Anglo-Irish politics. A remarkable editorial in the Nationalist *Freeman’s Journal* pleaded for Anglo-Irish unity in the name of securing Palestine’s Christian holy sites. ‘Let our quarrel with

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<sup>55</sup> Hansard, HC, XCI, cols.2054-55, 22 March 1917.

<sup>56</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 24 March 1917, p.13.

<sup>57</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 March 1917, p.5.

<sup>58</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 March 1917, p.1; *Irish Times*, 20 March 1917, p.4.

England be what it may,' its author wrote, 'here is an issue on which we can take sides with her.' Appealing to Irish Catholics, in particular, the editorial used Jerusalem's capture to question the commitment of Irishmen 'who pride themselves on having been born in the Isle of Saints' to the advancement of Christianity. For if Germany were to win the war, as the author dreaded, 'Jerusalem would revert to Turkey'. Under these conditions Irish neutrality was 'unthinkable', while 'to be actively hostile to the Allies would be infamous.'<sup>59</sup> The elation of Irish Catholics was also reported in provincial newspapers. County Cork's *Skibbereen Eagle* opined that 'no Irishman will refuse to salute' the flags of Britain, France, and Italy, all flying over their respective properties in Jerusalem. Like the *Freeman's Journal* it even suggested that Irishmen could 'forgive much of the past to England for what she has done this week.'<sup>60</sup> For others, however, old grudges were not easily forgotten. County Mayo's *Connaught Telegraph* ridiculed England for its absent-mindedness, writing that 'it looks like mockery to have England gloating over the achievement when we remember what Cromwell did to sacred places in Ireland'.<sup>61</sup>

The rights of small nations continued to be a contentious topic not just for the IPP and Irish newspapers but also for those interested in a lasting peace. Colonel Aubrey Herbert, Conservative MP for Somerset Southern, criticised what he saw as the British government's inconsistent application of these principles in the House of Commons on 13 February 1918,

In this War we have gone up to Baghdad and taken Mesopotamia, and we have said that that country must be governed in accordance with the desires of the people. We have gone to Jerusalem, and we propose to set up a free Jewish State. The point that I want to put to the House is this: are we not fighting for the same things in Europe as we are fighting for in Asia and Africa? Why should it be only the people in Asia and Africa who are to have the Government that they want?

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<sup>59</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 31 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>60</sup> *Skibbereen Eagle*, 15 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>61</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 29 December 1917, p.2.

‘If we are sincere’, he continued, ‘in desiring the self-determination of the peoples, there is only one way in which it can be secured, and that is by asking the people what they want? If we are not afraid of our ideals we shall not run away from a referendum.’<sup>62</sup>

Herbert’s support for political self-determination is hardly surprising. He was well known as an ardent advocate of Albanian nationalism in the year’s preceding the war, and he continued to back Albania’s cause both during and long after it. What is important is that for men like Herbert (and Irish Nationalists), those who held a Wilsonian vision of Europe’s peoples and its political organisation, the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem and the ensuing promises of self-determination made to Arabs and Jews were examples of political duplicity. On one hand, as he explained, Britain was keen to extend the rights of small nations to those in the Middle East. But on the other hand those same values were to be applied only selectively in Europe, if at all. Certainly, the Empire stood to gain politically from this policy in the Arab-Islamic and Jewish worlds. Herbert would have known this, as he was head of Naval Intelligence in Mesopotamia for the better part of 1916. But as he hinted in his impassioned speech to the House, if Britain did not extend the same opportunity to the peoples of Europe how could it claim to be fighting the war on behalf of liberty, freedom, and self-determination?

While domestic concerns, Irish Home Rule, and European politics often became intertwined with Baghdad and Jerusalem, most were certain that their captures had improved the Empire’s reputation in the Middle East. But did the fall of either city improve the Allies’ military position or signal the coming of a decisive victory over the Central Powers?

### *Military Value*

Although a vocal and somewhat pessimistic number saw Baghdad’s capture as a political gesture to appease the Arab-Islamic world, just as many wrote about the critical importance that Baghdad would have on the Allied war effort. The Conservative, middle-class *Daily Express* was sure that a British-controlled Baghdad reduced the Ottoman Army in Persia to a ‘mere militia’ and opened Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria to a two-pronged knockout blow from the Suez Canal

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<sup>62</sup> Hansard, HC, CIII, cols.160-4, 13 February 1918.



and Mesopotamia.<sup>63</sup> The pro-Labour *Wellington Times* wrote that Baghdad was the first step on the road to the Ottoman Empire's destruction.<sup>64</sup> The British *Church Times* and Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald* each argued that its capture had removed the combined German-Ottoman menace to Egypt and India and weakened the Ottomans as a military ally.<sup>65</sup> Ireland's *Kildare Observer* earmarked Baghdad as the first in what was surely to be a succession of Allied victories.<sup>66</sup> In visual terms that would certainly be unacceptable to a twenty-first century audience, the *Toronto World* published a cartoon showing the axe of 'British Forces' chopping the fez-capped head off a 'Turkey', over a wooden block bearing Baghdad's name.<sup>67</sup> Baghdad's capture even led to an outpouring of public support in London with the declaration of 'Mesopotamia Day' on 13 April 1917. Britons were asked to give what they could, whether bootlaces, cocoa, or coffee to the 'victorious army of the Tigris and Bagdad.' Hotels and restaurants established collection boxes in their storefronts. All donors were awarded one of a number of specially-designed tokens, including a badge with 'myrtle leaves, emblematic of Bagdad, medallions in metal, broaches with Arab designs, and a small badge in colours, depicting an oasis in the desert.'<sup>68</sup>

One of the most sophisticated appreciations of Baghdad's fall appeared in the right-wing *New Zealand Herald*. The city's capture was 'unmistakable evidence of [Germany's] decline in military power', wrote its editor-in-chief. On top of driving a wedge between Ottoman politicians who had pushed for an alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary and those who had supported neutrality, its capture had potentially enormous consequences. Constantinople's line of communication with Persia, the *Herald* argued, had been permanently severed. The British Indian Army and the South Persia Rifles were now freed to link up with the Russian Army at Hamadan. Once Maude's MEF was able to push past Baghdad toward Mosul, a joint Anglo-Russian effort could then develop from Armenia and advance toward the Ottoman

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<sup>63</sup> *Daily Express*, 12 March 1917, p.1.

<sup>64</sup> *Wellington Times*, 15 March 1917, p.3.

<sup>65</sup> *Church Times*, 16 March 1917, p.227; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March 1917, p.6.

<sup>66</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 24 March 1917, p.5.

<sup>67</sup> *Toronto World*, 12 March 1917, p.2.

<sup>68</sup> *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 26 March 1917, p.5.

capital.<sup>69</sup> Within days, of course, the *Herald's* latter two predictions fell flat with the breakout of the Bolshevik Revolution and Tsar Nicholas II's abdication.

Nonetheless, in Britain, especially, many hoped that Jerusalem's capture would galvanize Russia and the Bolsheviks to return to the fight. After conducting a public opinion survey in London, the *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury* found that most people expected Russian peasants to return to the war knowing that the heart of Orthodox Christianity was in Allied hands.<sup>70</sup> The right-wing *Morning Post*, a constant critic of Lloyd George's government, conceded that Jerusalem's capture was a strategic masterstroke. With Jerusalem secured it pointed out that Britain and Russia could cooperate 'in a cause far more popular in Russia than democracy or revolution – we mean the cause of the pilgrim.'<sup>71</sup> Similarly, an anonymous editorial in the *Economist*, despite being published one week after the Bolsheviks signed an armistice with Germany, was confident that 'Neither a Socialist coalition nor a Cadet Government' would fail to be moved by 'the deliverance of Jerusalem.'<sup>72</sup>

Others suggested that its capture foreshadowed the war's coming end. Gershom Stewart, Conservative MP for Wirral, was given a thunderous applause at a public meeting in Birkenhead when he predicted that Jerusalem gave 'sufficient reason for us to look forward with confidence to the new year that would bring peace'.<sup>73</sup> In Leamington Spa, speeches given at the Church Mission Society predicted 'brighter and better days' ahead, and the 'glorious hope before us that we shall soon gain victory and obtain peace.'<sup>74</sup> A crowd in Melbourne cheered loudly when William Hutchinson, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, called Jerusalem's capture a 'gleam of sunshine' during Australia and the Empire's darkest hour.<sup>75</sup>

Yet Jerusalem, more so than Baghdad, sparked a hotly contested debate about the war's strategic direction. In the House of Commons only one day after Allenby entered Jerusalem to accept its surrender, the IPP's John Dillon, MP for East Mayo, reprimanded his fellow MPs for

<sup>69</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 March 1917, p.4.

<sup>70</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, 15 December 1917, p.7.

<sup>71</sup> *Morning Post*, 11 December 1917,

<sup>72</sup> *Economist*, 22 December 1917, p.988

<sup>73</sup> *Cheshire Observer*, 15 December 1917, p.6.

<sup>74</sup> *Royal Leamington Spa Courier and Warwickshire Standard*, 14 December 1917, p.2.

<sup>75</sup> *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), 12 December 1917, p.10.

disparaging the war effort outside the Western Front. ‘If these side shows had been better attended to from the beginning’, he lectured, ‘the war would have been over before now.’ It was military victories on the war’s fringes, like those of Baghdad and Jerusalem, he contended, which were winning the war. Dillon’s exchange was printed in full in several newspapers, including the *Yorkshire Post*.<sup>76</sup>

As Dillon’s embittered censure reveals, Baghdad’s and Jerusalem’s capture did not receive universal praise. In a rare sight, surely, a dismayed Minister of Munitions Winston Churchill told a gathering in Bedford that the Empire was ‘in danger as it has not been since the battle of the Marne saved Paris and the battles of Ypres and Yser saved the Channel ports.’ The positive effect of Jerusalem’s capture was no match for the negative impact of Russia’s collapse.<sup>77</sup> Public commentators also voiced their opinions on the Empire’s war effort. *The Times* was certain that Jerusalem’s capture was a ‘most memorable event in the history of Christendom’, but warned against putting too much stock into ‘its influence on the war’.<sup>78</sup> Norwich’s *Eastern Daily Press* saw little in the way of a ‘purely military advantage’.<sup>79</sup> Five days after Jerusalem surrendered, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* published a sobering indictment of the Empire’s war effort. After calculating that the Allies did not have sufficient enough manpower to wage a successful offensive in France and Flanders, the author argued that the war’s peripheral operations had thrown Germany a lifeline. ‘It avails us nothing’, he pleaded, ‘to occupy Jerusalem and Baghdad, if in the main theatre we are not successful’. No matter how brilliantly the operations in Mesopotamia and Palestine were conducted, he reminded the reader that neither Maude’s nor Allenby’s success had settled anything: no Germans had been killed and it was the Ottoman Empire, not Germany, that had suffered.<sup>80</sup>

The same sentiment was expressed in the jingoistic weekly magazine, *John Bull*. In it, Bottomley penned a biting editorial in response to Lloyd George’s comments to the House that opened this article. Neither victory would be talked about as ‘the great outstanding feature of the war’, he wrote, and had Haig ‘not been denuded of many divisions of his best men’ Britain and

<sup>76</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 13 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>77</sup> *Luton News and Bedfordshire Advertiser*, 13 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>78</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1917, p.7.

<sup>79</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 11 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>80</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14 December 1917, p.4.

her Allies might have already won the war. Bottomley's accusation that the campaigns in Mesopotamia and Palestine had siphoned off the choicest men from the Western Front was, of course, nonsense. Be that as it may, Bottomley was convinced that the correlation between victory in the east and stalemate in the west was unmistakable. 'Baghdad and Jerusalem have added a prestige to the British Empire', he admitted, 'which, in itself, almost makes the war worth while'. But neither capture nor any other Middle Eastern operations would bring Germany to her knees. He ended the editorial on an emphatic note and in support of the main war effort on the Western Front: 'Stick to the Premier's old simile of the "knock-out blow." Meanwhile, let it be Haig and Robertson all the way.'<sup>81</sup>

### *Post-war Governance*

Public debate considered more than just how Baghdad and Jerusalem could boost the Empire's prestige and possibly change the military course of the war. It also contemplated how the two cities would be governed once the conflict came to an end. But instead of rendering the Middle East as an inferior civilisation that lacked the genetic makeup to be successful, the wartime press presented it as both a region and a civilisation teeming with potential; potential that had been stifled by centuries of Ottoman misrule. Once the Ottomans had been forcibly evicted, they argued, the Middle East would finally be free to thrive under British patronage.

To convince the public that the Middle East was in dire need of help, both Baghdad and Jerusalem were portrayed as stereotypical eastern cities: backward, poor, filthy, and disorganized. The right-wing *Brisbane Courier* contrasted ancient Mesopotamia, the 'land of ancient and opulent names', which included Baghdad, to twentieth-century Mesopotamia, a land of 'ghosts in what is now a strange and inhospitable land.' The article went on to describe the country as a land untamed by modern industry and civilisation, at the mercy of the region's unforgiving climate and extreme geography.<sup>82</sup> The daily *Auckland Star* reprinted a leader by the London-born war correspondent, Edmund Chandler, which wrote of Baghdad as 'the real East',

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<sup>81</sup> *John Bull*, XXI (1917), pp.8-9.

<sup>82</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 15 March 1917, p.7.

‘dry, parched, and crumbling, unluxuriant’.<sup>83</sup> The *New Zealand Herald* issued an equally gloomy assessment. From a distance Baghdad deceived the traveller by appearing to be ‘the wonderful city of Eastern history and romance.’ Yet upon closer inspection its veneer quickly wore off. ‘There are few towns even in Asia which have such narrow and winding streets’, the article grumbled. The streets were ‘genuinely Oriental’, ‘Unpaved and full of holes’, and littered with ‘heaps of rubbish, dead carcasses, and all kinds of rubbish’. Were it not for the ‘innumerable unowned and half-savage dogs’ that prowled its streets, Baghdad, Chandler wrote, would have faced a public health crisis.<sup>84</sup>

Jerusalem was described much the same. Like the disappointment experienced by most soldiers who entered it, the Holy City left much of the press scratching their heads.<sup>85</sup> New Zealand’s *Wanganui Chronicle* found it a baffling juxtaposition of ‘surprise and familiarity’, but overall a ‘bleak and desolate country.’<sup>86</sup> *The Times of India* presented its readers with a frightful picture of life in the Holy City, and one that was badly in need of an imperial makeover. ‘It is curious to note’, it argued, ‘how remote Jerusalem is from the rest of the world, how there is nothing in its situation to suggest a great capital’,

“No river nor any stream flows by,” writes one gifted traveller; “no fertility surrounds it, no commerce is able to approach its walls, no thoroughfare of nations it finds in the way. It seems to stand apart from the world, exempt from its passions, its ambitions, and even its prosperity. Like the high-priest who once ministered in its temple, it stands solitary, and removed from all secular influences, and receives only those who come to worship at its mysteries.”

Modern Jerusalem, as the Indian *Times* saw it, paled in comparison to its past. It possessed no natural beauty and neither a domestic nor global economy. And it was shockingly small, ‘wholly disproportionate to its fame and influence on the human race.’ It would ‘hardly occupy the space

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<sup>83</sup> *Auckland Star*, 17 March 1917, p.13.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 March 1917, p.6.

<sup>85</sup> Bar-Yosef, *Holy Land*, pp.276-92; Kitchen, *British Imperial Army*, pp.89-92

<sup>86</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 12 December 1917, p.6.

included between Oxford-street and Piccadilly on the north and south and Park Lane and Bond-street on the east and west.<sup>87</sup>

The joyous reactions of Baghdadis and Jerusalemites to the sight of British and Dominion soldiers were used as further proof that the Empire was not just needed, but wanted, too. In an article titled ‘Zion Rejoices’, the Nationalist *Irish Independent* reported that there was ‘hardly a soul in Jerusalem’ who was not ‘elated at this fresh great success of the British arms.’<sup>88</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* published a number of articles detailing the reactions of Jerusalemites throughout December, January, and February. In a piece of rather witty journalism, the *Guardian* claimed that

‘When the Generals advanced to take the surrender the population seemed quite overcome with their joy at their deliverance. Flowers were showered on the General and the troops of his escort. Had palm branches been available the people would have waved these, but the Turks destroyed the palm trees of Jerusalem some time ago.’<sup>89</sup>

Letters from soldiers fighting in Palestine as well as from clergymen who had travelled the region also poured into the *Guardian*. An article by an anonymous officer from Manchester who claimed to be one of the first to enter the city described its capture as a euphoric scene,

When we entered the populace were mad with joy...there was great cheering and clapping of hands; also shouts of “You are welcome,” and old women and men crying with joy. People offered us wine, nuts, bread, and all sorts of things to eat, but we had to get on toward the Jericho road, along which the Turks were retiring.<sup>90</sup>

It is unlikely that Jerusalem’s inhabitants would have had the means to shower soldiers with such an offering, as the city was near starvation and riddled with typhus by the time of its capture. But

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<sup>87</sup> *The Times of India*, 26 November 1917, p.6.

<sup>88</sup> *Irish Independent*, 17 December 1917, p.6.

<sup>89</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>90</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1918, p.8.

the description of the crowd's collective emotion was probably not that far off reality.<sup>91</sup> Letters from members of the American Colony sent to the Manchester Talmud Torah School were also published. One anonymous letter detailed crippling inflation, widespread famine, and mass death until Britain, 'our salvation', arrived.<sup>92</sup> Even on the other side of the Empire, on Canada's west coast, the *Vancouver Daily Sun* published a sermon by Reverend JL Campbell of First Baptist Church in Vancouver, who had spent time in Jerusalem between 1913 and 1914, in which he detailed the 'blight' spread over Palestine by Ottoman rule and his confidence that British protection 'will do for Palestine what she has done for Egypt.'<sup>93</sup>

Emphasis on the Ottomans' mismanagement of Baghdad and Jerusalem reflected the widespread belief both in Britain and the Allied countries that the war was an epic struggle for liberal values.<sup>94</sup> It also provided enough wiggle room for supporters of British liberal imperialism to be heard. They pushed a far-reaching political agenda that sought to maintain Whitehall's influence in the Middle East long after the war's end. Yet this position was far different than the irredentism of men like Davidson and MacInnes. British rule in Baghdad and Jerusalem became about revitalising the ancient civilizations of Palestine and Mesopotamia; more like reclamation projects than imperial clean slates.

It was 'for the infinite good of mankind', according to Chelmsford's *Essex County Chronicle*, that Baghdad had fallen to the Empire.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, in shades of Rudyard Kipling's 'White Man's Burden', the Unionist *Glasgow Herald* discussed the modernisation of Baghdad as a sort of cosmically ordained task; an unparalleled opportunity to resuscitate Mesopotamia. 'Here in the scene of perished civilisations', it instructed the reader, 'it may be our destiny to make one more experiment where so many have failed.' The article continued to explain that it was 'no "mere accident", we are convinced, which has set us down "between the rivers," in what has been called the home of the human race'. A divine hand had surely been at work. The Empire had been afforded the chance to 'rejuvenate the land' and to 'bring its people under the

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<sup>91</sup> See Conde de Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I: The Palestine Diary of a European Diplomat*, Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Roberto Mazza, eds, (London, I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp.186-97.

<sup>92</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1918, p.8.

<sup>93</sup> *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 11 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>94</sup> Nicoletta F. Gullace, *"The Blood of Our Sons": Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp.19-23.

<sup>95</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*, 16 March 1917, p.4.

influence of a culture as much superior to the benevolent despotism of the Abbasid caliphs at their best as that excelled the glittering barbarism of Babylon and Assyria.’ Indeed, by taking Baghdad, the *Herald* argued, the Empire had prevented Mesopotamia from becoming a ‘servile State.’ Instead of German domination, Britain offered a ‘unique type of imperialism’: the ‘ideal of liberty.’<sup>96</sup>

Less sanguine about Baghdad’s and Mesopotamia’s futures was the left-wing *Nation*. It positioned itself somewhere between those who saw no hope for an Arab revival and ‘more friendly historians’ who explained away the Arabs’ decline as a result of the ‘dead hand of the Turks’. The *Nation* warily pointed out that Baghdad’s restoration would be an endlessly complicated and likely impossible project. Its main contention was that a free and self-governing Mesopotamia was at odds with the bureaucratic baggage that would accompany British and European capital. ‘The influx of capital means the imposition of “alien institutions”’, and, as such, it could not understand how the florid prose of Maude’s proclamation to Baghdadis would ever be realized. ‘Mecca and Nejd may be left to the Middle East’, the *Nation* concluded, but ‘Baghdad and Basrah are destined to be governed as Bombay and Cairo are governed.’<sup>97</sup>

Jerusalem, too, presented an opportunity to flex the Empire’s civilisation-building muscle. Typical was an article by the *Manchester Guardian*’s editor, CP Scott. Surveying British control of the Middle East in the paper’s leading editorial on 8 February 1918, he began by making a case for a major offensive in the Middle East but spent far more time writing about the future of British rule in the region. ‘It aims’, he began, ‘at reviving two ancient civilisations, the Arab and the Jewish, and giving them a worthy territorial frame.’ What Scott was suggesting was a federated British world system where the British Empire would ‘act as the executors of an international will alike in Mesopotamia and in Palestine’. By championing the cause of the Arabs and Jews, Britain’s Middle Eastern policy was in line with its defence of ‘liberty, law, and the rights of small nationalities in Europe.’ He explained that if Britain rose ‘to the height of our opportunities, a new civilisation will arise’ throughout the Middle East that would finally bring ‘wealth and happiness’ to the world.

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<sup>96</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 March 1917, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> *The Nation* (London, England), 24 March 1917, pp.824-5.



The world will be enriched by a new Semitic culture and enterprise, gathering round the shores of the Syrian desert as the Latin culture has gathered round the shores of the Mediterranean. So immense are the possibilities of the estate that under Turkish rule has been allowed to go back to the prairie.<sup>98</sup>

Others repeated Scott's views. At Newton Park Baptist Union Church in Leeds, Reverend AK Stowell lectured that governing 'such a mixed community as that of Jerusalem and Palestine' would 'test the genius of the British race', and, if successful, perhaps provide a Rosetta Stone to governing Ireland.<sup>99</sup> As the history of Mandate Palestine made painfully clear, that was a test the British failed. Wondering who would come to govern Jerusalem after the war, the *Birmingham Daily Post* was sure that under British supervision it would 'become the capital of a great modern state'<sup>100</sup> In a leader in Melbourne's *Argus*, Britain and the Allies would 'make Jerusalem beautiful and clean, sacred and free once again.' While Baghdad was 'an adventure into the glamour of romance,' Jerusalem's capture gave the Empire a once-in-a-lifetime chance to begin a 'new era for mankind', where 'Jerusalem may become for the world of the future more than Athens, or Oxford, or even Rome ever was for the world of the past.'<sup>101</sup> And that era, at least according to Hull's *Daily Mail*, would be one of unprejudiced British rule. 'We enter the Holy City', it wrote,

with reverence and respect, determined to hold the scales of even justice between Jew, Christian, and Moslem. We bring with us the pledge and the promise of protection and toleration for all faiths, all races, and all classes. We warred against the alien tyranny of the Turk, but we hold the Mohammedan veneration for Christ, for Jerusalem, and for the Mosque of Omar to be as sacred as our regard for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or the site of the Temple. All are dear and precious

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<sup>98</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February 1918, p.4.

<sup>99</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 December 1917, p.5.

<sup>100</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>101</sup> *The Argus*, 12 December 1917, p.8.

to our eyes, for our goal has been won by the joint arms, endurance, and enthusiasm of Christian, Jewish and Moslem soldiers.<sup>102</sup>

In what was surely a painstakingly worded sentence, done to dispel any allegation that Britain was fighting a religious war against the Ottomans, the article noted that the EEF was a multi-ethnic, multi-faith army. Christians, Jews, and Muslims had all banded together under the Union Jack to fight Ottoman despotism.

Yet the issue of British control over Jerusalem was so sensitive that some even suggested it become an international city, albeit one in which Britain still played a role. The *Derby Daily Telegraph* proposed that postwar Jerusalem should be jointly governed by Britain and Russia.<sup>103</sup> The *Nottingham Evening Post* pointed out that it was European enterprise that had started to modernize Palestine toward the end of the nineteenth century, and that it would be a ‘European effort that restores it to something like its proper place.’<sup>104</sup> In this regard, these public proposals overlapped the secret plans to internationalize Jerusalem as part of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Leaked by the Bolsheviks in late November 1917, the agreement between the aforementioned Sykes and the French diplomat, Francois-George Picot, placed postwar Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth under the combined governance of Britain, France, and Russia. One of the more novel but tremendously pragmatic ideas came from the *Sunderland Daily Echo*. It proposed that Jerusalem should be made the site of the peace conference and that all future conflicts should be settled by diplomatic means in the ‘ancient City of Peace.’ It made a convincing case that a peace signed in Jerusalem would better secure relations amongst Britain, France, and Germany than a ‘Peace of London, a Peace of Paris, or a Peace of Berlin.’<sup>105</sup>

### *Conclusion*

More than a decade after the Armistice, the British Army maintained that the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem made a positive mark on public opinion. In Captain EW Sheppard’s

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<sup>102</sup> *The Daily Mail (Hull)*, 11 December 1917, p.4.

<sup>103</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1917.

<sup>104</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 December 1917, p.1.

<sup>105</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 14 December 1917, p3.

*Military History for the Staff College Entrance Examination*, he insisted that the war had been fought not just on the battlefield but also in the hearts and minds of the Empire's people. Victories such as Maude's at Baghdad and Allenby's at Jerusalem, Sheppard asserted, went a long way toward achieving that goal. He wrote of Jerusalem's capture, in particular,

A war of nations is, as we have more than once insisted in these pages, not an affair of military action alone, but a conflict of minds and spirits, where moral forces have even more than their normal weight, and where to seem victorious is little less important than being so in reality...no more important proof or fruit of our victory at the end of [1917] could have been offered to the weary and disillusioned, though still resolute, Allied peoples.<sup>106</sup>

Yet had the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem soothed the Empire's war 'weary and disillusioned'?

To start, there was near complete consensus that the Empire's prestige, shaken in the Arab-Islamic world by the evacuation of Gallipoli and the surrender at Kut al-Amara, had been repaired if not fully restored. Excluding Anglican and other Protestant irredentists throughout the Empire, few discussed Baghdad and Jerusalem as territorial rewards.<sup>107</sup> The capture of the two cities did, however, raise uncomfortable truths about the politics of empire, Ireland especially, the inescapable domestic trade-offs made to win the war, and the very reasons Britain was fighting.

The military value of Baghdad and Jerusalem was not as clear. Many newspapers rightly advised that the two captures would have only a slight impact on the war's outcome. Yet previous suggestions that the press and public only understood Baghdad and Jerusalem as political triumphs, not military ones, have missed a remarkable debate that very much considered their military consequences. We have seen how Baghdad's capture was discussed as a springboard for a future Anglo-Russian offensive aimed at Constantinople, how Jerusalem's

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<sup>106</sup> Captain EW Sheppard, *Military History for the Staff College Entrance Examination: A Brief Summary of the Campaigns, with Questions and Answers* (Aldershot, Gale and Polden, 1933), p.91.

<sup>107</sup> French, *British Strategy*, p.82.

capture inspired hope for a final victory in the coming year, and how the two considered together led certain press outlets to call for an all-out offensive to take the entire Middle East.

On top of how Baghdad and Jerusalem would change the Empire's political and military situation during the war, the press and public were just as concerned about how the Middle East would be governed during peace. Running across almost all newspapers was the notion that Arab and Jewish civilisation would be resurrected under the Empire's watchful eye. With liberal imperialism as a north star guiding the lost and troubled, both civilisations would be free to shake off centuries of stagnation, induced by Ottoman misrule, and return to their past glories.

Ultimately, public opinion on the captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem reveals a well-informed, sophisticated, and occasionally combative debate about the two victories. From contemplating the destruction of Germany's Middle Eastern plans to the hope that Baghdad and Jerusalem could be reborn under British rule, both the press and public understood that the Great War was, in fact, a world war. Amidst the mud, blood, and death of the war in France and Flanders, and the enormous battles on the Eastern Front between Germany and Russia, the Empire paused to take note of Baghdad and Jerusalem and to determine what exactly they meant for the ongoing war effort and the eventual peace.

This leads to two final thoughts. First, by demonstrating the potential of Richard S. Grayson's call for 'military history from the street', this article shows that a re-evaluation of wartime press is badly needed. The remarkable range of fact, opinion, and conjecture disseminated by the press, both national and provincial, does away with the worn-out argument that the home front was either naïve or seriously uninformed about the war.<sup>108</sup> The war's other 'sideshows' would surely benefit from this approach. For example, how did the British and Dominion public view the campaign in East Africa? Did the press and public consider Salonika, often ridiculed as the war's 'largest internment camp', a wasteful expedition? Or, like with Baghdad and Jerusalem, did they understand and discuss the finer points of Britain's worldwide strategy? These are questions that deserve answers. Second, although this article considers

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<sup>108</sup> For the flow of information between soldiers and loved ones, see Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 5.

Baghdad and Jerusalem together, mostly because contemporaries did, one could make the case that the two warrant their own separate studies. Looking at public opinion about Baghdad and Jerusalem from the early twentieth century to the mandate period would certainly be worthwhile. So, too, would studies of other imperial encounters with the Middle East such as the Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882. In Jerusalem's case this could add considerable nuance to the historiography on its exceptional place in Anglo-Protestant society. Such studies could also tell historians a great deal about public support for the Empire's expansion, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as shifting attitudes toward the Middle East and Arab peoples. Indeed, the enormous possibilities opened up by digitization projects and searchable databases make these projects more reality than fantasy. And as this article has shown, 'military history from the street' may fundamentally change the way we think about the Empire at war.