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evvelin kimesne bilmeye"

Kadim is that no one knows what came before.

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Parry, Jonathan. *Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East.*

OXFORD: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022. 453 PAGE. ISBN:9780691181899.

JONATHAN CONLIN*

ABSTRACT

Promised Lands provides a narrative of how Britain laid the foundations of her twentieth-century Middle Eastern empire in the first half of the previous century, between the defeat of Napoleonic France in Egypt and the Crimean War. Deeply steeped in the memoirs and letters of the ministers, ambassadors and consuls directly concerned, Parry presents British policy as somewhat inchoate, free of either liberal or Christian interventionism.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, British Empire, Diplomacy, Stratford Canning, Middle East.

ÖZ

Promised Lands, Britanya'nın yirminci yüzyılda sahip olduğu Ortadoğu imparatorluğunun temellerini, önceki yüzyılın ilk yarısında, Napolyon Fransa'sının Mısır yenilgisi ile Kırım Savaşı arasında nasıl inşa ettiğine dair bir anlatı sunuyor. Bu proje ile doğrudan ilgili bakanların, büyükelçi ve konsolosların anı ve mektuplarını derinlemesine nüfuz ederek kullanan Parry, İngiliz politikasının, liberal ya da Hıristiyan müdahaleciliğinden bağımsız olarak biçimlendiğini ve bu tarihte henüz olgunlaşmamış bulunduğunu ortaya koyuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Britanya İmparatorluğu, Diplomasi, Stratford Canning, Ortadoğu.

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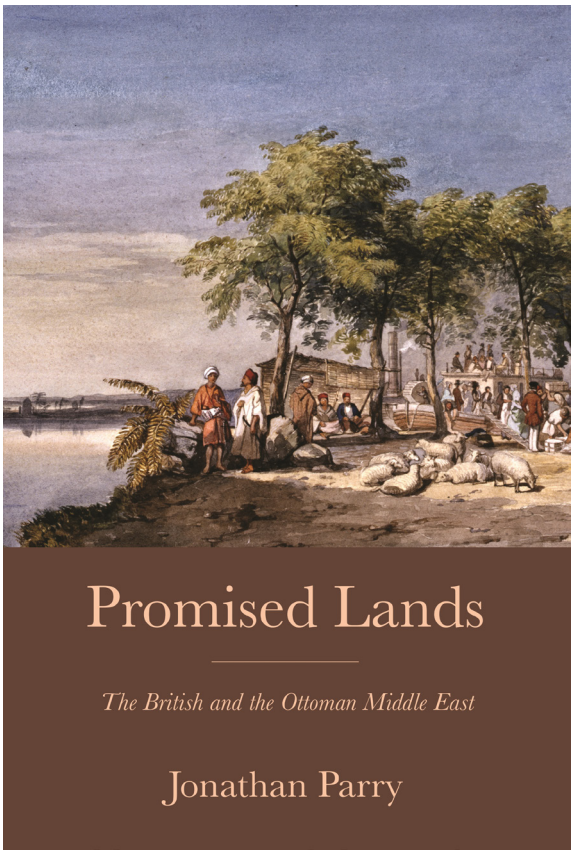

A scholar with a well-established reputation among historians of High Victorian political culture, Jonathan Parry may not be a familiar figure to historians of the Middle East. Parry was first drawn to consider the Ottoman Empire as one of the many arenas in which the titans of Victorian conservatism and liberalism respectively, Benjamin Disraeli and William Ewart Gladstone, crossed rhetorical and ideological swords. Of course, for both men the region held a deeper significance that transcended questions of mere political advantage. Disraeli's Jewish pedigree and Gladstone's High Anglicanism saw both identify and indulge visions of "the East" as well as analogies between the English and the Church of England on the one hand and various eastern empires and churches on the other.

Parry's expertise in this area has clearly been enriched by opportunities to interact with a younger generation of Cambridge scholars (such as David Gange, author of *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion, 1822-1922* and co-editor with Michael Ledger-Lomas of *Cities of God: the Bible and Archaeology in nineteenth-century Britain,* both published in 2013). Otherwise Parry gestures towards Edward Said's *Orientalism*, but notes that, as a "political historian", he (Parry) has a responsibility to make "distinctions across time", as opposed to the "general explanatory models" he sees Said and his followers as pursuing.

A dozen chapters and four hundred pages take us from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 to the Crimean War half a century later. Although Egypt is never out of sight, Parry devotes considerable attention to Ottoman borderlands in Kurdistan as well as the Persian Gulf and Aden. Drawing heavily on the correspondence of ministers in London as well as East India Company (EIC) officials, successive ambassadors to the Porte and a lively cast of agents, factors and consuls, Parry's British empire is far from centralized or tightly-run. In 1807 and 1809, he notes, London and Calcutta both sent an agent to Persia, each entirely ignorant of the other side's initiative.

Agents in the field, such as Claudius Rich, the EIC's man in Baghdad between 1808 and 1821, are given plenty of room to develop their own petty fiefdoms and even their

own policies - seduced, in Rich's case, by a vision of a charmingly chivalrous "Koordistan" redolent of the Scottish Highlands. Figures like Rich were wont to claim greater knowledge of the region than their distant bosses in London and Calcutta. Parry's focus on the narrative cut-and-thrust leaves him with little opportunity to analyze the nature of this knowledge and experience.

Parry seems shy of committing himself to an explanation for how Britain managed, through all this apparent dislocation, "to stake a strong claim - under the carapace of Ottoman sovereignty - to nearly all the parts of the Middle East that it governed after 1918". He sees steam power as having a role to play in helping the British establish claims in the Ottoman pashalik of Baghdad on the back of Lynch Brothers (est. 1841), whose steamships plied the Tigris and Euphrates: "Britain's main weapon in strengthening its position" in this contested region. Otherwise the High Victorian historian John Seeley's famous "fit of absence of mind" seems to fit the bill.

The ministers and ambassadors at the heart of the narrative are principally motivated by a desire to prevent France from returning to the region in force. Under the influence of George Hamilton Gordon, 4th Earl of Aberdeen, this saw Britain form a surprisingly forgiving alliance with Russia, meekly accepting loss of diplomatic face at the Porte as well as Russian military advances south into Bulgaria and Kurdistan.

Parry is persuasively insistent that Britain had no capacity or appetite to govern the Ottoman Empire's territories directly. "But," he adds, "that did not reflect a lack of ambition or influence".

Far from supporting Mamluk pretensions Parry presents Britain as seeking to curtail Mehmet Ali's military adventures in Syria (which his forces invaded in 1831), joining in the 1840 intervention by the European "concert". Instead British envoys encouraged him to focus on the economic development of Egypt (including a state cotton monopoly managed by Samuel Briggs, a British Levantine of Alexandria), a project viewed as enriching Egypt, the British Empire and the world at large. Nominal sovereignty would continue to be paid to the Porte. As for the question of the relative importance to Britain of Suez or the Straits, Parry argues both that this was a choice the British sought to duck, and that the answer remained the same ("Egypt was essential; Constantinople was contingent") throughout the period under review. Though readers may find this unsatisfying, Parry's point remains persuasive: identifying something we might label "British imperial policy in the Middle East" is difficult enough, let alone debating alternative visions of that policy.

Parry is equally firm that British policy (or rather, the various policies of British agents) was (were) free from any whiff of either liberal crusade or religious sectarianism, be that in discourse or deed. His officials show little interest in ensuring that Tanzimat reforms were rolled out consistently across the Empire. In 1847 British ambassador to the Porte Stratford Canning hatched a plan to end legal distinctions between Muslims and the *rayas* (allowing Christians to serve in the Ottoman armed forces and give evidence in court on equal terms). This step, which for Canning marked the Empire's entry into the "pale of civilized nations" (286), was only taken in 1854, however, in the very different context of the Crimean War, and Canning's attention always seemed somewhat divided, thanks to hopes of greater office back in London.

The British decision to station a consul in Jerusalem (1838) and the associated Anglo-Prussian initiative appointing an Anglican-Lutheran bishop of Jerusalem (1841) are brief exceptions which prove the rule that, for Britons, faith ends at the water's edge. This in stark contrast to the Russians and particularly the French, with their vast network of Roman Catholic hospitals and schools. The millenarianism seen in the activities of the London Jews' Society in the 1820s as well as the diplomat-cum-archaeologist Austen Henry Layard's hiring of Nestorian co-religionists to excavate Assyrian antiquities at Nineveh (1845-1846) are represented as temporary escapades, rather than an undercurrent which one might see reappearing, say, in post-1918 visions of reconsecrating the Haghia Sophia as a place of Christian worship.

Promised Lands is a work nervous of staking wider claims for its significance. In his conclusion Parry states that "the early British encounter with the Middle East is interesting in its own right, rather than for whatever help it may give in understanding later events". He nonetheless does point to a number of enduring consequences of, say, the trucial order the British established among the Persian Gulf shaikhdoms, which secured Ibn Saud's eastern flank, setting him free to turn west, eventually pushing the Hashemites out of Mecca and Medina. For many of his fellow scholars, however, the single-empire perspective may prove a source of frustration. Though it delves deeply into them, this book draws heavily on sources found in the British Library or National Archives at Kew. Though Parry has uncovered a diversity of voices within these and other British repositories, this reader sometimes felt a trip to Paris, St Petersburg or Istanbul might have been indicated. Within these parameters, *Promised Lands* provides a deeply-researched, well-written and nuanced narrative.