

**Zionism's Maritime Revolution: The Yishuv's Hold on the Land of Israel's Sea and Shores, 1917-**

**1948**, by Kobi Cohen-Hattab. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. x + 335 pages. Bibl. to p. 323. Index to p. 335.

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Kobi Cohen-Hattab's account of the relationship of Jewish settlers in British Mandate Palestine – or as he describes it 'the Land of Israel' whose inhabitants were all 'Arabs' and not 'Palestinians' – is a useful addition to studies of Palestine's early history and to the role of the sea to life on the land. The book under review is interesting and readable, and considering Zionism's settlement project it gives significant insights into how a national movement dedicated to controlling the land had to consider its littoral maritime space. This meant not just the ports of Palestine but also fishing – not just in the sea but in inland waters such as lakes Tiberias and Huleh – and the shipping that carried cargo, passengers, and settlers to and from the country.

Methodologically, the author situates his study as a (p. 5) 'bottom up history' but his examination considers also the role of high politics, notably clashes between Revisionist and mainstream Labour Zionism on the development of maritime policy. The book's central argument (p. 8) is that there occurred in Palestine a Jewish 'maritime revolution' during the British Mandate period as Jewish leaders, by the 1930s anyway, recognised the 'critical value of the sea in institutional independence and sovereignty and the necessity of ruling the outlet to the sea and of various maritime professions.' Thus, the sea changed from a transition space and being a (p. 15) 'non-entity' to assume a pivotal role in the project to establish a Jewish state. In this endeavour, the Jews were traditionally an (p. 15)

'interior people' so new thinking and attitudes needed to take root among the Jews of Palestine. Alongside the new muscular Zionist-Judaism of sports leagues and gymnastics clubs for settlers, there were now leagues for sea sports (p. 17): 'to expand and firmly root the desired image of the New Jew in the land. Maritime activity was, then, part of body culture, and in the developing physical activity the muscular man of the sea took his place within "muscular Judaism".' Seafaring rose to assume a central place on the agenda of mainstream Zionism as Jewish leaders realised that control of the land required control of the sea.

Geography had a strong part to play here as Palestine had only one major port in the 1920s – Jaffa, with ships having to anchor in the roadstead – before the completion of Haifa deep-water port in 1933. The Jews also established a small port at Tel Aviv in 1936. Palestinian stevedores ran Jaffa port and while the Yishuv – the Jewish community in Palestine – infiltrated workers into Jaffa port they never loaded or unloaded cargo. The need to control access to Palestine was obvious and the key was Haifa that had a mixed Jewish-Arab workforce, the Jewish proportion increasing over the 1930s. Jews made assiduous efforts to introduce their own workers, especially Jewish dockers from Salonica who arrived in the 1930s after anti-Semitic violence in Greece. Palestine's ports became routes for Jewish weapons smuggling, with one cement barrel breaking apart in 1935 to reveal an ammunition cache inside.

Inter-communal violence hastened Jewish control of the bigger Haifa port, with strike action by Palestinians during the Arab revolt of 1936 closing the all-Palestinian Jaffa port. Haifa boomed,

transshipping goods such as fruit from the expanding citriculture industry, with Jewish dock workers eventually transferring all-Jewish cargos to Jewish ships. Alongside this, the smaller, all-Jewish Tel Aviv port started shipping cargo. The Yishuv was strengthening its control of littoral space and Haifa port was the game changer. The Jewish labour organisation, *Histadrut*, even placed Jewish workers in the nearby Atlit quarry that supplied the stone for the breakwater at Haifa. The only failure was the attempt to establish Jewish shipping lines. While a US-funded Jewish passenger ship set sail in 1925, such schemes foundered on a lack of funding and poor management. The Yishuv tackled this problem in the 1940s, by which stage it had a much-improved maritime strategy.

Similarly, Jews moved into fishing, seeing this as another vital national endeavour. Jews were unused to fishing and initial snags of unfamiliar waters, poor marketing systems, short fishing seasons, and the control exercised by Palestinian families to fishing rights on Lake Tiberias restricted fishing in the 1920s. (Internal Zionist political divisions also hampered progress in all these maritime activities according to Cohen-Hattab.) The Jewish Agency worked to improve fishing and by the 1930s it was a major industry. Even smaller lakes such as Huleh (now largely drained) were areas for pioneer Zionist labour activity dedicated to fishing, whose macho boatmen glided across the lake to (p. 181) 'conquer it. The sea is very pretty, but it is customary for us not to be "impressed" by nature, because that is a "neophyte trait".' In Cohen-Hattab's view, the shift in Zionist thinking on the sea came after 1933, the year that Haifa port opened. Prior to this, thinking on maritime policies had been (p. 104) 'immature' and 'short-lived'; after this date, new organisations such as the Jewish Agency's Maritime and Fisheries Department, and with it a nautical school for ships' officers, shifted the rules of the

game. By 1935, there were (p. 117) 'sea conquest' kibbutzim groups. In the same way that the 'new Jews' of Palestine were becoming farmers and pioneers, they were becoming fishermen and sailors. In the second half of the 1930s, properly constituted Jewish shipping companies also emerged, creating a (p. 151) 'constant Jewish line of cargo and passenger ships' between Palestine and Europe. These Jewish-flagged ships were crewed, owned, and supplied with onboard food by Jews. War after 1939 militarised Jewish sea space. The Yishuv looked to place its men in Royal Navy ships, the British preferring to put such volunteers in auxiliary roles usually given to non-British sailors. Meanwhile, the Jewish Agency inaugurated a 'Sea Day' and the Jewish military strike force, the *Palmach*, started marine military training, with British help, before 1945 anyway, from which emerged the *Palyam* as the naval part of the *Palmach*, and the core for Israeli naval special forces after 1948.

Readers interested in Zionism and the history of Mandate Palestine will enjoy this book and be rewarded by its scholarship and rich detail, assuming that is, they can afford the exorbitant price tag for the hard-back book (that also has, to be fair, e-book versions that seem to include a PDF format and may cost less).

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