**1927: Earthquakes, Unemployment, and the Infrastructure of Mandate Palestine**

**S. Irving**

**Sarah Irving**

Although Lord Plumer’s tenure as high commissioner for Palestine (1925–28) is sometimes characterized by mainstream Euro-American histories as a period of comparative peace, the year 1927 saw two major disruptions: the Jericho earthquake in July, which caused serious damage to towns and cities including Jerusalem, Nablus, and Lydda; and unrest amongst Jewish immigrants who found that the local economy had no jobs to offer them––or at least not ones at the European rates of pay to which they were accustomed. This article explores the way in which each of these crises intersected with Palestine’s infrastructure––in particular its railways, roads, and housing stock. I argue that the disparate ways in which the British administration approached earthquake victims versus the unemployed, the help it offered (or failed to offer), and the policies it implemented are telling about the nature of British governance in Palestine in the mid-1920s and British administrative priorities and concerns. The Mandate authorities’ responses to the quake––characterized by selective negligence––reveal the colonial administration’s weakness, the contested ways in which colonial structures were shaped and operated in the early Mandate period, and the extent to which maintaining a facade before other colonial powers and the League of Nations outweighed substantive action.

**Keywords**: earthquake, Palestine, Mandate, British colonialism, housing, railways

When a major earthquake rumbled and churned its way through the land of Palestine on the afternoon of July 11, 1927, it affected human and non-human beings, as well as the built and natural environments. At Suq al-Khawajat (the goldsmiths’ market) in Jerusalem, severe damage to the stone buildings of the northern section meant that many of the traders (mainly in textiles and leather, despite the market’s name[[1]](#endnote-2)) who rented shops from the Nusseibeh family were forced to move elsewhere.[[2]](#endnote-3) This northern section of the suq was never rebuilt[[3]](#endnote-4) and, since 1967, Sabrah,[[4]](#endnote-5) the name given to the open land left when the rubble was cleared (and where, according to Sari Nusseibeh’s memoirs, his uncle used to tether his camel) has been vulnerable to occupation and expropriation by the Ateret Cohanim settler organization.[[5]](#endnote-6) The impacts of this natural disaster, a few moments of seismic shaking almost a century ago, are thus seen to reverberate through Palestinian history down to the present day. The structural damage affected the livelihoods and everyday existence of traders and the networks of labor dependent on their presence, while the political and economic policies of the Mandate administration and the decisions made by the owners of destroyed property had far-reaching consequences.

As scholars of natural disasters have highlighted,[[6]](#endnote-7) although the impacts of such events affect entire societies and regions, they do so unequally and unevenly according to factors such as class, race, gender, and political power. In colonial settings, particularly, access to relief and support in the aftermath of disaster is not only determined by socioeconomic inequalities but further distorted by the priorities of colonizing states. Indeed, the agendas of extractive and/or settler colonialism ensure that responses are inequitable in a socioeconomic sense, and that state actors may grasp disasters as opportunities to impose new relations of power and domination––or, conversely, opposition and resistance movements may seize upon them to create and extend their own networks.[[7]](#endnote-8)

The 1927 Palestinian earthquake, an event which in its initial moments was independent of the Balfour Declaration, political Zionism, Arab nationalism, or British colonialism, shows us a cross-section of these currents that are usually the focus of studies of Mandate Palestine. The ways in which Palestinian society, the British colonial administration, and the Zionist movement responded to the quake reveals much about everyday Palestinian life and British colonial governance. Piecing together accounts of the earthquake from memoirs, autobiographies, and letters as well as from reports in the colonial archives, I seek to assemble an image of the earthquake’s impacts on the infrastructural environment inhabited by ordinary Palestinians in 1927: the roads, railways, housing stocks, schools and other buildings, and structures which facilitated daily life. I argue that considering these, alongside information on the period after the earthquake and the decisions made about what to repair or rebuild and how to go about it, reveals the Mandate administration at this time as a bureaucracy concerned mostly with its own self-perpetuation, above any clear ideological commitment to any of the inhabitants of the country itself. Contrary to positions which regard the British as deeply committed to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine for religious, political, or racial reasons, I suggest that the administration’s response was that of an entity concerned mostly with a wider project of projecting British imperial power and prestige despite the under-resourced and vulnerable status of the position in Palestine, and in the face of criticism from the League of Nations and its Permanent Mandates Commission.

As discussions of infrastructure in settler-colonial settings––ranging from historical North America, Australia, and Africa to the contemporary occupied Palestinian territories (oPt)––have shown, the outwardly benign face of infrastructure as something that facilitates human health, education, and movement can quickly morph into something much more sinister when relations of power, domination, indoctrination, and exploitation come into play.[[8]](#endnote-9) As well as obvious military manifestations such as checkpoints, barracks, and walls, any inhabitant of the West Bank can describe how a road, once it is surrounded by electrified fences, barbed wire, and no-go areas, becomes a means of appropriation and domination far exceeding the narrow strip of tarmac. Roads, ships, and railways carry troops or expropriated natural resources; they may be built by paid and unionized workers or enslaved, corvée, and otherwise bonded labor. The advent of sanitation and domestic energy systems can improve everyday life, or it can exacerbate social hierarchies and exclusion. As noted above in the case of natural disasters, however, the situation is not inherently and solely one-directional. As the Indigenous American activist and scholar Winona LaDuke highlights, infrastructure can be a tool of the toxic logic of settler colonialism, which she describes as embodying the spirit of the violent, cannibalistic (will-to-)power called the Wiindigo,[[9]](#endnote-10) but it can also be reappropriated by Indigenous peoples and reshaped for their social, economic, and political benefit.[[10]](#endnote-11) Building and rebuilding infrastructure in the wake of an earthquake or other disaster can, from the perspective of colonized peoples, be both desirable and threatening, depending on the specifics of the decisions made and their execution and impacts. In Mandate Palestine, for example, electrification was sought after by many towns and cities, but due to the allocation of concessions by the British, it was dominated by Zionist interests and helped run and sustain British military installations,[[11]](#endnote-12) while road building, which could have opened up economic possibilities for rural communities, was instead planned around colonial needs.

This case study of the impacts and aftermaths of the 1927 earthquake for the Palestinian population, and the nature and agenda of the British response to it, begins with an overview of the damage caused by the earthquake to public buildings and infrastructure across Mandate Palestine. Through snapshots of three specific forms of infrastructure––railways, housing, and roads––I look in depth at the impacts of the earthquake on Palestinian communities and the British authorities’ responses, drawing on these for insights into the dynamics of colonial power in mid-to-late 1920s Palestine and how Palestinians experienced, coped with, and circumnavigated the deployment of such power. I argue that in most cases, the British mandatory authorities’ reactions to the earthquake might be dubbed selective negligence, with the paucity of their response in some areas contrasting with activity in others. In many cases, this negligence was rooted in racialized ideas about Palestinians, Arabs, and Jews, but, as I argue above, it was also a product of the Mandate administration’s ultimate concern for its own prestige and survival above other interests and priorities. The impacts of this actively negligent stance have been examined in relation to other aspects of Palestinian life under the Mandate, such as health and education.[[12]](#endnote-13) Infrastructure, as a category that includes material entities of clear and concrete use to the administration itself (roads, railways), as well as those about which it cared little or not at all (Indigenous homes) offers, I argue, a particularly stark vision of the extent to which the British authorities disregarded the mass of the Palestinian population.

**The Damage Done**

In what little has been written about the 1927 earthquake, the focus often lies on famous buildings damaged––such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem––or on the destruction of individual homes. Certainly, in the days and weeks following the earthquake, many residents of Nablus, Ramla, Lydda, and Jerusalem lived in tent encampments outside their cities until their houses were deemed safe or they found new accommodation. Jacob Orfali, an Armenian Jerusalemite, recalled decades later that his family “spent a few weeks in tents in a large park across from the Armenian convent of St James on Mount Zion” before moving into the Armenian Quarter itself.[[13]](#endnote-14)

The long-term and broader impact on Palestinian society, however, resulted from the damage to economic, social, and logistical infrastructure. In Nablus, building collapses and falling masonry in the Old City caused many deaths and widespread destruction, particularly in areas dense with shops, stalls, and workshops in the main suq.[[14]](#endnote-15) According to some accounts, the death toll there may have been high because upon the initial, weaker shock, shopkeepers ran outside to see what was happening and went back inside when the tremor ceased, either because they assumed that this was a weak quake of the kind to which they were accustomed or, conversely, because they feared wider damage and wanted to close up their stores to prevent theft.[[15]](#endnote-16) Whichever was the case, this meant that many traders were either inside their shops and crushed when the second tremor hit, or they were close to buildings damaged in the sequence of shakes and were thus hit by falling masonry outside. The Old City was still a major economic hub so the *mankubin,*[[16]](#endnote-17) those whose homes were damaged or destroyed, also lost many of the places where they spent their daily lives: workplaces (and the equipment or trade goods inside them), mosques, churches, the Samaritan synagogue, cafes, bathhouses, and so on.

Although Nablus was the worst hit city in terms of damage to the central Qasaba and the suqs, many other cities also suffered extensive collapses, with people crushed under the rubble and property devastated. Within Jerusalem, many homes, especially in the Maghrebi Quarter, were damaged, as well as commercial properties such as those of Suq al-Khawajat, described above. The outskirts of Jerusalem were also badly hit in places, particularly the water infrastructure in Abu Dis, where Bertha Spafford Vesta of the American Colony recorded that “Abu Dis depended upon rainwater cisterns for its water supply. Every cistern was cracked and the water drained out. My husband and I toured the damaged cities and villages. We found Abu Dis sadly in need of help. Dysentery and enteric fever were prevalent; nearly everyone was suffering from sore eyes caused by the high wind which raised dust from the crumbling houses. Water was non-existent and had to be carried for several miles from the Apostles’ Fountain in a deep defile.”[[17]](#endnote-18) Because the earthquake took place on the afternoon of a weekday, many of those writing memoirs later in life recalled being at school when it occurred, either as pupils or as teachers. The well-known writer and educator Akram Zu‘aytir’s autobiography includes a dramatic description of the escape from his Nablus classroom through falling masonry, alongside the schoolboys he was teaching.[[18]](#endnote-19) Helen Bentwich, wife of the British administration Attorney-General Norman Bentwich, recorded that the boys’ school next door to the kindergarten she ran in Jerusalem was destroyed, so the school took over the building usually used for the younger children.[[19]](#endnote-20) And in his semi-autobiographical novel *In Search of Walid Masoud*, the writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra wrote,“I thought for a minute that the raging gale was rocking the old building to and fro” as he sat in his Bethlehem class. The school itself was unharmed but the children, having run outside, saw stones falling from older buildings across the street.[[20]](#endnote-21) In 1927, educational provision only extended to a fraction of Palestinian children, and the loss of school buildings, many of them private facilities and would not automatically be rebuilt by the government, would have been disruptive for the minority who had accessed the system.

Beyond the structures of daily life for Palestinians, significant damage was also done to parts of the public, state-run infrastructure of Palestine. Major roads were seriously damaged, such as the Jerusalem-Jericho highway. The Palestinian doctor Izzat Tannous, who had been asked to go to Jericho to treat the injured, wrote later that he “ had to drive very slowly because part of the road was just cut open,” while the British police officer Douglas Duff’s lurid memoirs report that two sections of the Jericho-Jerusalem road were seriously damaged, with sections of road fallen off cliffsides and into wadis near Khan al-Ahmar.[[21]](#endnote-22) The Allenby Bridge across the River Jordan near Jericho was fractured,[[22]](#endnote-23) and the Mandate administration’s files in the British National Archives suggest that there was widespread damage on the railway network, to both tracks and stations, but that this was fairly superficial in nature. The built infrastructure of British colonial control across Palestine was also hit by the quake. Since World War I, the Augusta Victoria Stiftung outside the Old City of Jerusalem had been used as Government House, the official residence of the high commissioner. This was seriously damaged, so Lord Plumer and his wife moved into a series of temporary accommodations, and a new Government House was constructed.[[23]](#endnote-24) A number of police stations and security facilities suffered widespread collapse or complete destruction, including those at Jericho (housed in a former Russian pilgrim hospice), the Kishleh outside the Old City of Jerusalem,[[24]](#endnote-25) and parts of the Nablus police compound, where a Palestinian police officer was killed.[[25]](#endnote-26)

Once the initial crisis of deaths, injuries, and damage to housing was addressed, mainly by sheltering the displaced in tent encampments in the warm, dry summer weather, the official response to the earthquake had three main components. The British administration perceived government property, ranging from the railway system to the high commissioner’s residence, as its own responsibility and repairs to it were paid for accordingly. The owners of domestic buildings––homes, but potentially overlapping into small business premises such as shops attached to houses––had to be repaired or rebuilt, and the government made some support available in the form of low-interest loans, along with safety inspections of damaged structures and limited advice on making new buildings more earthquake-proof. Public buildings not owned by the government, such as places of worship or nonstate schools, were left in the hands of their respective communities; no loans or other state support were available for them, as witnessed in the long drawn out controversy over repairs to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher,[[26]](#endnote-27) and in the Jerusalem Sephardic community’s anger over the contributions of British Jews of Portuguese and Spanish descent to the general emergency fund rather than to help rebuild Sephardic schools and synagogues.[[27]](#endnote-28)

**Housing**

Housing and surrounding structures––streets, sanitation, energy supplies, and water––are the forms of infrastructure that most commonly affect ordinary people in their daily lives. In contrast to its railways, the Mandate administration took little medium- or long-term responsibility or action when it came to Palestine’s housing stock. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, emergency housing in the form of tents was set up, in some cases by local municipalities and in others by the army, at times funded by the charity appeal which was quickly issued by G. S. Symes (chief secretary to the Government of Palestine from 1925–28) in the Palestinian, British, and international press.[[28]](#endnote-29) As noted above, since the 1927 earthquake occurred in high summer, the authorities had a certain amount of leeway because the families camped out on the outskirts of Nablus, Jerusalem, and Ramla were unlikely to be hit by rain, snow, or storms, and makeshift sanitation was easier to control in dry weather.

Nevertheless, within weeks of the quake, government documents start to show concern about the prospect of rehoming hundreds of people before autumn and winter weather started to set in. A series of committees were established to administer the proceeds of the emergency appeal and to consider longer-term solutions; with an eye to the optics of the situation and a desire to be seen by other Great Powers, the League of Nations, and its Permanent Mandates Commission, to fulfil the terms of its mandate, the administration carefully appointed a mixture of Muslim and Christian Palestinians, Jews, and British officials to the committee and subcommittees.[[29]](#endnote-30) The documentation of these committees, if indeed they ever met with any regularity, has not apparently been preserved in either British or Israeli archival collections. What can be observed of government activity regarding the rebuilding of domestic infrastructure is that building inspectors were dispatched to observe major demolitions and give advice on the safe removal of dangerous ruins. Government pamphlets on how to demolish and rebuild safely were also produced, although in reality the search for survivors and bodies, and the significant extent to which domestic reconstruction was left up to individuals, meant that these probably had minimal impact. In later documents in the colonial archives, British officials acknowledged the administration’s failure to draw up or implement proper building safety regulations and counter-earthquake measures. The paucity of the response also highlights the skeletal nature of the British administration in Palestine, where a bureaucracy focused fundamentally on its own image and self-perpetuation consistently failed to take substantive action, while maintaining a facade for the benefit of international opinion.

For a brief period after the tremors, a report by the US earthquake expert Bailey Willis, who had been in Cairo on the way to observe seismic conditions in Palestine when the quake struck, was circulated among officials and widely mentioned in government correspondence. In addition to his influence on the government, Willis’s ideas extended into other parts of both Palestinian and colonial society; he gave a lecture at the American Colony,[[30]](#endnote-31) and his report was translated into Arabic and published in *al-Kulliyya al-Arabiyya* (*The Arab College Quarterly*), the journal of the Government Arab College in Jerusalem, thus presumably entering future Palestinian discourse on building methods.[[31]](#endnote-32) One of Willis’s main themes in relation to architecture was the notion that older, “traditional Arab” buildings were ill-suited to withstanding the impact of seismic tremors because of their use of untied walls packed with rubble, and of heavy masonry and domes that were liable to collapse. This narrative mapped closely onto the assumption by Symes and other senior British officials that the reason that almost no European Jews were injured or rendered homeless (as opposed to long-residing Palestinian Jewish communities and Samaritans who did suffer) was because their buildings were modern and thus safer, rather than because very few Zionist settlements had been built in the regions struck by this particular quake.[[32]](#endnote-33) Even the profoundly racist British policeman, Douglas Duff, made observations which show that the stereotypes perpetuated by Willis and Symes about architectural styles, modernity, and vulnerability to earthquake were not borne out on the ground, noting that the traditional mudbrick homes of Jericho withstood the quake well, while European-designed buildings in Jerusalem were among those that sustained the worst damage.[[33]](#endnote-34) But the idea that reinforced concrete was more durable under seismic shocks took root, not only reinforcing Orientalist tropes about the superiority of new, “scientific” Euro-American technologies but also stimulating the market for concrete as a building material and, as most or all of the specialists in this kind of building were Jewish, causing a shift in construction employment away from skilled Arab stonemasons to Jewish cement technicians.[[34]](#endnote-35)

Despite the brief flurry of interest in building standards, the administration’s experience of 1927 was not translated into consistent policy or practice, and local archives such as those in Nablus suggest that the majority of planning and building regulations was left for the municipalities to handle. Indeed, only in 1945, after several smaller quakes had caused or exacerbated earlier damage, did conversations take place in the upper echelons of the administration about comprehensive policies on building safety. One official confessed that “many, if not most, of the buildings constructed in Palestine since the 1927 earthquake have little or no provision to resist earthquake shocks. Fortunately, there have been no severe earthquakes since, but the recent bomb outrages have given evidence of the inability of certain types of recent building to withstand ‘shocks’ similar to those of earthquakes.”[[35]](#endnote-36) Given the assumptions that Indigenous architecture was inherently inferior, embedded in Willis’s report and the minds of the British officials who shared it with one another, it may even have been fortunate for the inhabitants of such structures that building regulations based on inaccurate knowledge of seismic shocks and erroneous prejudices about Indigenous building techniques had not been imposed earlier. Instead, Indigenous knowledge based on repeated experiences of earthquakes could continue to be implemented. Clearly, local building techniques were not perfect; many died or were injured in the collapse of structures raised in the Ottoman or earlier periods, and it is important not to exoticize or essentialize an Indigenous ideal.[[36]](#endnote-37) However, it is also important to note three things. First, that areas of major damage in both Nablus and Jerusalem seem to be zones of poverty and high population density, where buildings were likely to have been poorly maintained. Second, that a number of structures designed and/or built by Europeans, such as the Augusta Victoria, also suffered considerable and fatal damage. And third, there is not a single style of Palestinian architecture, and some styles withstood the earthquake well, such as the houses of Jericho and their lighter frameworks, which had similarities to the “modern” homes in Zionist colonies that Willis and Symes had praised.

In Ramla and Lydda (where around 8,000 people were estimated to be living under canvas in the immediate aftermath of the quake, with 100 families in need of direct aid to rebuild their homes[[37]](#endnote-38)), responsibility for the relief effort was divided, with the central government advancing funds to local authorities.[[38]](#endnote-39) For ordinary Palestinians whose homes and neighborhoods had been damaged or destroyed, initial help thus seemed to come from municipalities, while their understanding of the shortcomings of the central government’s response was manifested by the “hostile” demonstrations that met the high commissioner when he attempted to visit damaged areas in Nablus.[[39]](#endnote-40) As the Nablus archives highlight, in addition to taking the lead in emergency relief and provision of tents, food, and other immediate necessities, municipalities took charge of reconstructing local infrastructure such as roads and public buildings, and coordinated with institutions such as waqf committees to deal with public structures such as mosques and churches. In many respects, the municipality system in Palestine was a legacy of the Ottoman Empire, composed of a small, elite, male fragment of society, many of whom might be viewed as comprador figures whose interests were firmly entwined with those of the British. In this they differed little from the national leadership of the Husseinis and Nashashibis, and like them, operating in conjunction with the British administration––in this case, to deliver earthquake relief––represented an opportunity to forge patron-client relations and to control how state funds were allocated.

At times, however, the situation brought local and central governments into competition: in Nablus, the municipality came into protracted conflict with the mandate Department of Antiquities over the eastern and northern walls of the Great Mosque. This twelfth-century edifice was still standing after the earthquake, but the municipality saw the damage as an opportunity to enlarge the public space outside and to build or renovate surrounding commercial properties. After the structures were made more dangerous by winter conditions, the carved Crusader masonry was pulled down, resulting in an often volatile controversy between the mayor of Nablus, the Department of Antiquities, the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), the local waqf authorities, and the British Public Works Department, which remained unresolved by the time of the British exit from Palestine in 1948. In this case, the municipality, with possible collusion from the waqf authorities and SMC, successfully undermined the British administration’s privileging of medieval Christian heritage in favor of an urban planning agenda focused on trade, rental income, and notions of modernity.

Families who lived in rented accommodation had to depend on the owners of their homes to rebuild or repair them, or find other houses. In some neighborhoods, such as the Samaritan Quarter in Nablus and poorer areas of the Old City of Jerusalem, this precipitated significant changes as older, less stable, and less lucrative buildings were pulled down and their occupants left for new, in some cases purpose-built, communities outside the traditional city limits.[[40]](#endnote-41) In Nablus, in particular, the earthquake seems to have been a major, if not the main, factor driving the Samaritan community from its longstanding residence of the Sumarah Quarter to new homes outside the Old City, as well as causing more affluent residents to move from enclosed courtyard homes to more open sites on the slopes above the city.[[41]](#endnote-42)

For those who owned their homes and could not afford to pay to rebuild them from family funds, the Mandate government established a system of loans, payable over ten years at 6 percent interest,[[42]](#endnote-43) at least partly funded by public charitable appeal and available to applicants in both Palestine and Transjordan. Sums of under sixty Palestine pounds were regarded as personal loans; those over sixty pounds as mortgages, thus making the debtors vulnerable to foreclosure. Although these loans were touted as benefiting the poor and those unable to access credit,[[43]](#endnote-44) their conditions––proof of the ability to pay and guarantees from “respectable” persons––likely excluded those most in need. Certainly, in Bethlehem, Jabra noted that the older parts of the city were home to many people who made their livings farming on the outskirts, while still owning small houses within the traditional residential areas. Living effectively rural lives, close to the poverty line, these families––who presumably either did not know about the loan fund or were unable to access it––found it hard to rebuild their dwellings.[[44]](#endnote-45) Even for those who could draw on the social capital necessary to take out a government loan, the amount of personal information that had to be revealed to the state would have set new precedents for government intervention in their lives. Many memoirs of late Ottoman and early Mandate Palestinian life stress the reluctance of many people, especially in rural areas, to share personal information with the state: the quest to avoid taxation and conscription in some cases meant that even formally registering births was not widely accepted until the early twentieth century––and the demand to hand over details of income, savings, and family membership must therefore have been intrusive to many.[[45]](#endnote-46) The loan scheme may also have failed to reach some of those who needed it because of its fairly short duration and underlying assumptions about how earthquake damage affected buildings; unseen or apparently minor cracks could worsen considerably in winter weather or under new stresses,[[46]](#endnote-47) or, following the cycles of rural and family life, the owner of a building might only decide on the need to reconstruct some time after damage occurred, only to be dismissed by the uncomprehending officials who received their application for funds.[[47]](#endnote-48) Where homeowners sought to rebuild in the same urban location as their previous houses, the procedural assumptions of Mandate officials also at times clashed with the realities of the multilayered-built environment of old cities like Nablus, where shops, homes, and other functions overlapped, making reconstruction socially and economically complex.[[48]](#endnote-49) And, perhaps unsurprisingly given both global economic trends from the late 1920s onward and the economic policies of the Mandate administration, the ten-year loan period proved too stringent for some borrowers who were still being pursued for payments or declared defaulters into the 1940s and even guarantors for some loans were subject to legal action.[[49]](#endnote-50)

Beyond the official mechanics of loan eligibility, other factors influenced the Mandate government’s willingness and ability to support ordinary Palestinians in repairing and rebuilding their homes. Chief among these was a racialized conception of the different “types” of people the British ruled by in Palestine, in which Jewish immigrants from Europe were perceived as individual, civilized, and advanced, while “Orientals”––Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Palestinians whose culture was broadly Arab––were understood as primitive, foreign, and collective in their behaviors. This “typology” intersected with infrastructure and the impacts of the earthquake in a number of ways. We have already seen how British officials in Palestine assumed that Palestinian ways of building houses and community structures were more vulnerable to earthquakes than so-called modern architectural styles, but underlying assumptions also colored British views of who should be responsible for the rebuilding effort. In cities, understood as more modern spaces, individuals were expected to access loans and repair their own homes. In rural villages, such as Reina in the Galilee, by contrast, Symes and other senior British officials seem to have assumed that a collective effort would spare the administration the task of helping people to rebuild their houses, as well as take charge of reconstructing the social infrastructure of churches, shops, and other sites where daily life took place.[[50]](#endnote-51)

**Railways**

In sharp contrast to the uneven and at times actively neglectful British response to the quake’s impact on ordinary Palestinians and their homes and livelihoods, the internal reports of damage to the railway network, including stations and other supporting infrastructure fundamental to commerce, were rapid, comprehensive, and precise. Where rail lines and buildings had been affected, they were quickly repaired, and this fact was conveyed to the center in Jerusalem equally quickly. According to reports sent between the head of Palestine Railways, the administration in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office in London, after tracks and bridges were checked, trains were running again by 11p.m. on July 11, 1927, that is, only eight hours after the quake took place.[[51]](#endnote-52) The management of Palestine Railways also submitted lists of damage to network structures, particularly railway stations, to the central administration, and repairs to these appear to have been treated as a matter of course. Indeed, repairs to government buildings were handed directly to the Public Works Department without question; the major expenditure entailed in building a new Government House in Jerusalem was also authorized despite the administration’s constant insistence on lack of funds. Admittedly, this issue predated the earthquake but it was greatly expedited by the serious damage to the Augusta Victoria building, which the British were renting from its German owners. The crisis thus exacerbated existing patterns of inequality and imperial neglect of the Palestinian population.

In much twenty-firstcentury liberal Western discourse, railways have acquired benign associations due to their new-found status as a less climate-damaging form of long-distance travel than flying. If we consider their historical role in the settler colonizations of North America and Australia, however, the construction and expansion of railways takes on very different meanings, as one of the key means of infrastructural penetration and control of colonized territories and of extracting economic value.[[52]](#endnote-53) During the Ottoman period, the southwards drive of the Hejaz railway east of the Jordan River was resisted both politically and militarily by Bedouin groups who clearly saw it as an attempt to impose central state domination and taxation,[[53]](#endnote-54) while the westward spurs from the main line, extending to the growing port of Haifa, were a significant factor in the city’s rapid expansion at the expense of its ancient neighbor, Akka.[[54]](#endnote-55) Building railways and the support infrastructure that came with them––stations, sidings, maintenance and repair facilities, security posts––also took up land and displaced people from their homes, under both Ottoman and British rule,[[55]](#endnote-56) while the expansion of the railway networks carried new diseases with it.[[56]](#endnote-57) During World War I, Palestine’s railways became one of the most important strategic focuses in the battle between Ottoman/German and British imperial forces. Control over them marked some of the major victories in the British campaign.[[57]](#endnote-58) The railways were also one of the main means through which the British connected their imperial presence from Egypt to Transjordan and maintained links with their fellow Mandatory power, France, in Syria. By the imposition of British Mandatory rule in Palestine, therefore, the railways had been established as one of the most important planks of colonial rule not only on the physical level of economic and military concerns, but also in terms of their discursive value, as markers of modernity, civilization, and technological progress.[[58]](#endnote-59)

While one might argue that despite the threat they sometimes posed to Indigenous life, the continued functioning of rail infrastructure could have enabled the broader relief effort, there seems to be little consideration of this angle in the archival record––and, indeed, while some badly-hit locations such as Nablus were on the railway network, others, particularly seriously affected rural towns and villages such as Reina, could not be served by train. This highlights the extent to which rail networks in Palestine, as in other colonized settings, prioritized colonial economic, political, and military connections and control, rather than the everyday needs of the Indigenous population. For ordinary Palestinians, the available destinations and the cost of train travel rendered it a minor fact in everyday life, while the rail network as a grand concept loomed large in the military, economic, and psychological significance of Britain’s presence in Palestine.

**Refusing Donations, Building Roads**

The most recently established Jewish communities in Palestine were not significantly affected by the earthquake but they were experiencing another major problem: unemployment. By 1926, the economy of Mandate Palestine was in recession, affecting both the Jewish and Arab populations.[[59]](#endnote-60) The latter, from the perspective of the British administration, was more easily ignored. As shown by Symes’s comments, mentioned above, on the rebuilding of villages such as Reina, Palestinians were assumed, in the racializing mindset of British officials, to operate on a communal level of villages and of extended families. These were expected to support unemployed relatives, absorbing them into a mode of production characterized by shared agricultural work into which surplus labor could be enfolded. Zionist-sponsored immigration from Europe had, however, reached a peak in 1925, stretching the movement’s resources.[[60]](#endnote-61) Recently arrived Jews, unlike Arabs, however, were perceived as European and thus as individuals in need of welfare support.[[61]](#endnote-62) This picture probably did reflect some aspects of reality insofar as many Zionist immigrants had fewer close friends or relatives already in the country to whom they could turn for help and were thus reliant on handouts from Zionist organizations and local municipalities.[[62]](#endnote-63) It ignored, as was the case throughout the Mandate period, the social and economic strain placed on Palestinian extended families expected to support out-of-work and landless relatives. Jewish immigrants were also more likely to be found in major cities such as Haifa and Tel Aviv, rendering them more visible to the authorities (and to visitors and the press) than were Palestinian villagers. And meanwhile, Zionist movement enterprises such as Solel Boneh, established to provide the industrial “absorptive capacity” which was supposed to enable mass immigration, were faltering and in some cases going bankrupt.[[63]](#endnote-64)

But the British administration’s concern for European Jewish unemployment was also a product of its desire not to be seen by other colonial powers and the Permanent Mandates Commission to be reneging on its commitments under the Mandate and the ideas of the Balfour Declaration embedded within it. That concern affected both its response to the 1927 earthquake and its approach to building infrastructure. Given the importance the British administration in Palestine publicly attached to the fundraising effort for earthquake relief, it is telling that in a letter dated July 20, 1927––just nine days after the quake––Symes mentioned to Sir John Shuckburgh, assistant under-secretary of state at the Colonial Office, that:

On the top of this earthquake has come the unemployed Jewish [indecipherable]. The PZE.[[64]](#endnote-65) [Palestine Zionist Executive] cannot afford to continue the dole and wish to “pass the baby” to a paternal [indecipherable]. We don’t quite admit paternity, but the baby––if passed to us–– can’t be allowed to starve. So when Felix Warburg called me from New York offering the good offices of the Joint Distribution Committee for the Earthquake Relief Fund––which is not required for Jews––I replied to him, individually, that “charity begins at (National) home” and [indecipherable] you about the serious situation of Jewish colonists here. We can’t use Jewish unemployed to rebuild the “suk” at Nablus, and if the Palestine taxpayers have to feed starving Jews they will demand the emigration of part of the 20,000 surplus Jewish population.[[65]](#endnote-66)

This brief passage reveals a number of things about the way in which Symes, the British official in charge of the administration at this moment, while High Commissioner Sir Herbert Plumer was on leave, was thinking about the situation which faced him. First, that he considered Jews not to have been affected by the earthquake, an incorrect assumption based on an Arab/Jew binary that excluded, for instance, the many Sephardic Jews and Samaritans who lived in the traditional housing of Nablus and Jerusalem and who were rendered homeless alongside other Palestinian families.[[66]](#endnote-67) For Symes, Jews were European and modern. Second, his primary mode of thinking about the twin problems of the earthquake and unemployment was informed first and foremost by the requirements of Britain’s political bind after it promised Palestine to the Zionist movement. Thus the significant sums of money being offered by Warburg and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which could have enabled a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to remedying the destruction caused by the earthquake, were to be diverted to save face for the PZE and the British Mandate authorities. The final line of Symes’s comments reveals just how vulnerable the British felt their position to be: it implicitly acknowledges that the logic of absorptive capacity––the idea that the Palestinian economy could support large numbers of Zionist newcomers, based at least in part on an assumption that European Jews would modernize Palestinian agriculture and industry––was deeply flawed.

Warburg’s offer, and Symes’s response to it, highlight the different viewpoints at play on the subject of Palestine. Warburg (1871–1937), a member of the German-American Jewish banking elite, was not a political Zionist, although he was involved in many of the institutions that facilitated Jewish settlement in Palestine, he also devoted much of his time and money to diaspora causes. A major donor both in a personal capacity and via his prominent role in the JDC, his philanthropy was often focused on Jews wherever they might be in the world. Indeed, at this time, he was one of those community leaders in the United States who had put support for Russian Jews displaced by WWI and the October Revolution “at the forefront of American-Jewish political life,” helping them to establish farms and businesses within the Soviet Union rather than encouraging migration to Palestine.[[67]](#endnote-68) To the frustration of the dominant faction in the Zionist movement, and despite his personal friendship with Chaim Weizmann, in the early 1920s Warburg showed little interest in their project (and was at times deeply skeptical of it). Only after the disturbances of 1929 did he become institutionally involved with Palestinian issues to a significant extent, although in this arena he and Weizmann were often fiercely at odds with one another.[[68]](#endnote-69) So when Warburg made the offer of JDC funds to Symes, he presumably either assumed that Jews in general had been affected by the earthquake or, more accurately than Symes, realized that some Palestinian Jews would have suffered even if the Zionist settlements and Tel Aviv had escaped unharmed.

Symes, by contrast, seems to have possessed a deeply simplistic and unitary conception of Jewish interests, which assumed that Warburg would be supportive of the Zionist narrative on Palestine as a “National Home.” In this oversimplified view––a common problem which regularly exposed the British administration to poor decision-making––he saw Warburg’s offer both as an opportunity to relieve the British administration of some of the burden of supporting its unemployed Jewish population and to improve the existing infrastructure of the territory. Although unemployed Jews seem until this point to have been supported mainly via food and cash handouts from the PZE or Tel Aviv municipality, the Mandate administration wanted a workfare system under which those seeking help would be expected to provide labor. Rebuilding homes and infrastructure devastated by the earthquake might seem a logical way of providing such employment, but Symes apparently realized that this would make the scale of unemployment, and the fact that the British were providing support for Jewish newcomers but not for Palestinians, too obvious and visible to possible critics, including those within the League of Nations.

The outcome of the British administration’s political calculations was that Jewish workfare labor in 1927–28 was used not to repair the damage from the 1927 earthquake, but to build roads between Jewish colonies that also connected such colonies as Petah Tikva, Rishon LeTsiyon, and Rehovot to the rest of Palestine, and to expedite major construction projects such as the expansion of the Haifa harbor; indeed, among the other works postponed in order to maximize unemployment relief were those on the Rashidiya School in Jerusalem.[[69]](#endnote-70) As pointed out above, some roads, such as that leading from Jerusalem to Jericho, were seriously damaged by the tremors and were repaired by the Public Works Department since they represented routes between major towns and cities, necessary both for ordinary life and for colonial control. The Jericho road also gave access to the bridge across the River Jordan––itself severely damaged––and thus to Amman, capital of the British-dominated Emirate of Transjordan. That funds proffered by Felix Warburg and the JDC for earthquake aid were instead directed to relieving unemployment among those who had been encouraged to come to Palestine by the Zionist movement speaks volumes about the Mandatory administration’s priorities. Saving face in the eyes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, and avoiding complaints to the central government in London, was evidently far higher on the agenda than helping Palestinians such as the inhabitants of Reina, who were clearly left to fend for themselves. Far from trying to reach a fair resolution in which Jewish workfare labor might help earthquake survivors, British anxiety about being embarrassed meant that Zionist colonies and the Jewish unemployed both benefited from unemployment relief, while Palestinians with damaged or destroyed homes had to carry out or pay for their repairs with only minimal and temporary aid from the British mandatory authorities.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ways in which the British administration responded to the damage wrought on the built environment of Palestine by the June 1927 earthquake illustrate two main things about their priorities and agenda in Palestine. First, their conception of the quake’s effects and whom they impacted and how, spotlight the simplistic and racialized understanding of many British officials about the people they were ruling. “Arabs” were typified by one set of characteristics, “Jews” by another; crossovers, commonalities, and variations of culture or class had no place in the colonial vision: who needed or deserved help in recovering from the earthquake, and of what kind, was determined according to this framework. Indeed, despite the initial enthusiasm for Bailey Willis’s report on the earthquake and its effects, no long-term lessons were learned or applied in the shape of building safety regulations. This was perhaps because the lives lost were from those communities to whom the British attached least importance, but in the longer term, racialized assumptions about the safety of certain types of building left Jewish homes and workplaces exposed too, highlighting the breadth of the negligence to which all communities were exposed.

Second, one of the main concerns of the Mandate government was its own self-maintenance. The way it assigned varying priorities to different types of infrastructure made this especially clear. The charitable appeal following the earthquake permitted the administration to prop up its local and international image, while keeping actual expenditure of state funds to an absolute minimum. But the handling of Felix Warburg’s offer makes it clear that officially, professed concern for the victims of the disaster could quickly be set aside at the opportunity to tackle the problem of Jewish unemployment, which the British foresaw would be damaging to their credibility before the Permanent Mandates Commission at the League of Nations. The speed and precision with which the railway system was surveyed and repaired after the earthquake, and the large sums devoted to the construction of a new Government House, provide a sharp contrast to the often neglectful and vague attention given to residential rebuilding in villages such as Reina. Maintaining colonial operations and an image of order appeared to be uppermost in the administration’s mind.

Despite the paucity of the aid provided by the British Mandate administration to those who had lost family, homes, or livelihoods to the earthquake, adopting infrastructure as a lens through which to trace its impacts and the responses to them is also revealing about Palestinian society in the 1920s. In particular, it supports historical narratives that emphasize the strengthening of Palestinian identity in the early Mandate period. Local people and institutions stepped up to help those affected, and municipalities developed visions of how to rebuild their towns and cities that were at odds with those the Mandate government sought to impose. But the resilience and ingenuity of individuals and communities could not make up for the inadequacy of the British authorities’ response to the earthquake. The demonstrations that met Lord Plumer on his visit to Nablus highlight the dissatisfaction of ordinary people with the administration and their willingness to protest in order to demand better treatment. And, indeed, the administration was also sufficiently afraid of public anger as well as international disapproval that it made efforts to avoid laying itself open to the charge of helping Jewish unemployed over Palestinian earthquake victims. It would be difficult to find a clearer illustration of the ad hoc and short-sighted nature of British policy in Mandate Palestine.

**About the Author**

***Sarah Irving*** is a lecturer in international history at Staffordshire University and the editor of the Council for British Research in the Levant’s (CBRL) journal, *Contemporary Levant*. She has published widely on the social and cultural history of late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine.

**Acknowledgements**

This work was supported by the Leverhulme Trust under the Early Career Fellowship (ECF-2019-128).

**Endnotes**

1. W. J. Hopkins, “The Old City of Jerusalem: Aspects of the Development of a Religious Centre” (PhD diss., Durham University, 1969), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/8763/>; Nur Arafeh, “The Current State of the Markets in the Old City of Jerusalem” (background paper, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Ramallah, 2016), 1, <https://yplus.ps/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Arafeh-N.-The-Current-Status-of-the-Markets-in-the-Old-City-of-Jerusalem.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Sari Nusseibeh, *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Adonis, *Concerto Al-Quds*, trans. Khaled Mattawa (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 80, n. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Nazmi Jubeh, “The Ghettoization of Arab Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 16 (2002): 9, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/78008>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. “Suq al-Khawajat (Well-Off Market),” Enjoy Jerusalem website, Jerusalem Visitor Guide, accessed August 11, 2021, <http://www.enjoyjerusalem.com/explore/where-to-go/suq-al-khawajat-well-market>; Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, “Submission to the International Fact-Finding Mission on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” October 2012: 8, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Many historians, seismologists, sociologists, and campaigners have expanded on the 1968 comment by seismologist Nicholas Ambraseys that “earthquakes don’t kill people; buildings do” to highlight the extent to which class, ethnicity, gender, and other social variables influence what happens to individuals during disasters. See “Nicholas Neocles Ambraseys 1929–2012,” *Journal of Earthquake Engineering* 17, no. 3 (2013): 302. Examples include: the cultural overview of US Marxist historian Mike Davis in *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998); examinations of the injustices imposed on Black and working-class communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, see, for example, Gary Rivlin, *Katrina: After the Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015 and Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915–2015* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); accounts of how regional inequalities affected communities in Japan’s Tohoku region after the 2011 quake and tsunami, see Richard Lloyd Parry, *Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan* (New York: MCD , 2018), and oral histories such as Elena Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody: the Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. See, for example, Eleonor Marcussen, *Acts of Aid: The Politics of Relief and Reconstruction after the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Eleonor Marcussen, “1934 Earthquake: Making Political Capital from Relief Work,” in *Force of Nature: Essays on History and Politics of Environment*, ed. Sajal Nag (New York: Routledge, 2018), 109–22; Eleonor Marcussen, “Town Planning after the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake: Earthquake Safety, Colonial Improvements and the Restructuring of Urban Space in Bihar,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 22, no. 2 (December 2017): 321–54, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327306372_Town_Planning_after_the_1934_Bihar-Nepal_Earthquake_Earthquake_Safety_Colonial_Improvements_and_the_Restructuring_of_Urban_Space_in_Bihar>; Yogesh Raj, “Management of the Relief and Reconstruction after the Great Earthquake of 1934,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 20, no. 2 (December 2015): 375–422, <https://www.martinchautari.org.np/storage/files/sinhas-vol20-no2-notes-from-the-archive-yogesh-raj.pdf>; and Jonathan Todd Hancock, *Convulsed States: Earthquakes, Prophecy, and the Remaking of Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. See, for example, Andrew Curley, “Infrastructures as Colonial Beachheads: The Central Arizona Project and the Taking of Navajo Resources,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 39, no. 3 (June 2021): 387–404, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263775821991537>; Emilio Distretti, “The Life Cycle of the Libyan Coastal Highway: Italian Colonialism, Coloniality, and the Future of Reparative Justice in the Mediterranean,” *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 53, no. 5 (September 2021): 1421–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12724>; Martin Kalb, “Water, Sand, Molluscs: Imperial Infrastructures, the Age of Hydrology, and German Colonialism in Swakopmund, Southwest Africa, 1884–1915,” *Environment and History* 26, no. 2 (May 2020): 175–206, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096734018X15254461646521>; Simone Popperl, “Geologies of Erasure: Sinkholes, Science, and Settler Colonialism at the Dead Sea,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (2018): 427–48, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S002074381800082X>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Winona LaDuke and Deborah Cowen, “Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (April 2020): 244–45, 253, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-8177747>. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. LaDuke and Cowen, “Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure,” 255–61. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow: The Electrification of Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Fredrik Meiton, “Nation or Industry: The Non-Electrification of Nablus,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 80 (2019): 8–22, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1649527>. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Marcella Simoni, *A Healthy Nation: Zionist Health Policies in British Palestine, 1930–1939* (Venice, Italy: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 2010); Sandra M. Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine, 1920–1947* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Suzanne Schneider, *Mandatory Separation: Religion, Education, and Mass Politics in Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Jacob Orfali, *An Armenian from Jerusalem* (Berkeley, CA: Ronin Publishing, 1987), 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Jenifer Glynn, ed., *Tidings from Zion: Helen Bentwich’s Letters from Jerusalem,1919–1931* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 156; Douglas V. Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon* (London: John Long Limited, 1953), 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Edward Horne, *A Job Well Done: A History of the Palestine Police Force, 1920–1948* (Market Harborough, UK: Book Guild Ltd., 2003), 112; Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon*, 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. This term was widely used in the Palestinian and wider Arabic press; derived from the root n-k-b, to afflict or make miserable, the word Nakba, used for the 1948 displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians by the establishment of the state of Israel, comes from the same root. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem: An American Family in the Holy City, 1881–1949* (New York: Doubleday, 1950), 298–99. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Akram Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal: min mudhakkirat Akram Zuayter, 1909–1935* [The Beginning of the Struggle: The Memoir of Akram Zucaytir, 1909–1935] (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiya lil-dirasat wa-al-nashr, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Glynn, *Tidings from Zion,* 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud: A Novel*, trans. Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 131. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Izzat Tannous, *The Palestinians: A Detailed Documented Eyewitness History of Palestine under British Mandate* (New York: IGT, 1988), 129; Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon*, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. “The Earthquake in Palestine,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 27 (October 1927): 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.1086/BASOR1354757>. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Norman Bentwich, *Wanderer Between Two Worlds* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1941), 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. *Kishleh* simply means barracks and this is a term left over from the Ottoman period; several police stations, including that next to Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, are also referred to by this name in historical accounts, but this example seems to refer to the one outside the walls at the Russian Compound (al-Maskubiya). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Horne, *A* *Job Well Done*, 114; Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoo*n, 152–53; Letter from Redvers Bennett to Florrie Bennett, July 14, 1927; my thanks to Seán William Gannon for sharing this source with me. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue Their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Sarah Irving, ”Donations and Their Destinations in the 1927 Palestine Earthquake,” *Revue d’histoire culturelle*, no. 2 (2021), <https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/rhc/index.php?id=940>. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. officially announced for the first time in a special issue of the *Palestine Gazette* on July 15, 1927, four days after the earthquake. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. Official communiqué, “Earthquake Relief Fund: Appointment of a Central Relief Board,” July 20 or 21, 1927, file CO 733/142/13, British National Archives, London; The General Committee, which oversaw the fundraising effort, was chaired by Symes himself until the end of 1927, when he was promoted to the British Residency at Aden and was replaced by Edwin Samuel. The secretary was the Arab nationalist writer George Antonius, at the time a senior civil servant in the British Mandate administration, and the membership of the committees included prominent Muslim Palestinians (Said Bey Husseini, Amin Bey Tamimi, Awni Bey Abdul-Hadi, Omar Effendi Saleh, and Sheikh Mahmoud Dajani), along with Yaqub Farraj of the Greek Orthodox community, Sydney Moody, another senior civil servant within the Mandate administration, and “Mr. R. Lorenzo,” probably Raouf Lorenzo, a Catholic businessman who was killed in the Semiramis Hotel Massacre of January 1948. The two Jewish members on the committee were Judah Magnes of the Hebrew University, a recent migrant to Palestine, and “Mr. I. Zvebner,” who was possibly Isaac (Itzhak) Zwebner from an Ashkenazi family that had lived in Palestine since the eighteenth century. It is unclear if this is the same Ishak David Zwebner who registered a legal partnership for securities, debt, and import/export dealing (all skills highly relevant to the relief effort) in 1928(see Irving, “Donations and Their Destinations”). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Vester, *Our Jerusalem*, 299. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Bailey Willis, “Al-zilazal fi Filastin,” *Al-Kulliyya al-Arabiyya/The Arab College Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (December 1927**)**: 66-78, <https://palarchive.org/index.php/Detail/objects/215747/lang/en_US>**.** [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Irving, “Donations and Their Destinations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon*, 154; Vester, *Our Jerusalem*, 300. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. Nimrod Ben Zeev, “Foundations of Inequality: Construction, Political Economy, Race, and the Body in Palestine/Israel, 1918–1973” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2020), 43–4, 53; Nimrod Ben Zeev, “Building to Survive: The Politics of Cement in Mandate Palestine,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 79 (Autumn 2019): 41–2, 45, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1643033>. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. “Public Works Department: Roads and New Buildings–Order of Urgency–Procedure,” folder no.4125, Israel State Archives, <https://www.archives.gov.il/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. See, for example, debates in Shepard Krech III, *Myth and History*: *The Ecological Indian* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) and Michael E. Harkin and David Rich Lewis,eds., *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. “Earthquake of 11th July 1927,” 56–7, file CO 733/142/13, British National Archives, London [Is there a date or a range of dates, even a month and year when it was produced – the letters contained in the folder are dated 12th July 1927 to June 1928, although this isn’t indicated anywhere on the folder jacket] [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. “Earthquake of 11th July 1927,” 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Horne, *Job Well Done*, 114–15. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Naseer R. Arafat, *Nablus: City of Civilizations* (Nablus: Cultural Heritage Enrichment Center, 2012), 62–3. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Letter from the District Commissioner’s Office of the Samaria District in Nablus to the Chief Secretary, June 9, 1945, file ATQ/2/165, Archive of the Department of Antiquities of Mandatory Palestine (1919–1948), Israel Antiquities Authority, <https://www.iaa-archives.org.il/>; Arafat, *Nablus*, 62, 109, 217. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Letter from Sir John Shuckburgh, the head of the Eastern Department of the Colonial Office, to the Secretary of the British Treasury, September 22, 1927, file T 161/899, British National Archives, London. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. The government acknowledged, for example, that many well-off Palestinians invested their money in real estate, especially commercial buildings, and when these suffered severe damage the owners lost both their capital and the property that they might otherwise have offered as collateral for a loan (“Earthquake of 11th July 1927,” 61–62). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. Jabra, *Walid Masoud*, 133–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. Martin Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies in Palestine, 1917–1936* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55, 141; Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 44, 49, 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. Adel Manna’s oral history account of the Galilee village of Majd al-Krum includes a description of the impact of a later and smaller quake which took place in the spring of 1928, but the fairly serious damage from which only made itself known a year later: It seems that the earthquake itself did not do massive damage that day. It did, however, shake the foundations and rooftops of rural homes dating back to the days of Zahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani during the eighteenth century. The damage caused by the earthquake became apparent “about a year later in January 1929, when ‘over 50 [second] stories began to collapse’” (Adel Manna, “From Seferberlik to the Nakba: A Personal Account of the Life of Zahra al-Ja‘uniyya,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 30 (Spring 2007): 66, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/77898>. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. “Earthquake Loans–General, 1927–37,” 48–50, folder file 4836/10, Israel State Archives, https://www.archives.gov.il/en/archives/Archive/0b071706800225ea/File/0b07170680e183dd. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. Arafat, *City of Civilizations*, 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Israel State Archives folder file 8/1943, “District and Village Administration,” <https://www.archives.gov.il/en/archives/Archive/0b071706800322aa/File/0b07170680a4e290>; “Earthquake Loans–General, 1927–37.” [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Irving, “Donations and Their Destinations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. “Earthquake of 11th July 1927,” 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. For detailed accounts of these dynamics, see, for example, Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Kalb, “Water, Sand, Molluscs.” [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. See, for example, Tariq Tell, “Guns, Gold and Grain: War and Food Supply in the Making of Transjordan,” in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Steven Heydemann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 38–58; Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16, 63–6, 198–99. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Yossi Ben-Artzi, “Cartographical Evidence of Efforts to Develop Acre during the Last Decades of Ottoman Rule: Did the Ottomans Neglect the City?” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 31, no.1 (2016): 66, 69, 71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518967.2016.1173358>; Johnny Mansour, “The Hijaz-Palestine Railway and the Development of Haifa,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 28 (Autumn 2006): 9, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/77910>. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. For example, the outbreak and subsequently endemic status of leishmaniasis in the village of Artuf caused by a British Empire encampment in WWI, and the post-war prevalence of the same disease in Haifa once rail operations were centralized there instead of at Qantara in Egypt (Tawfiq Canaan, “Topographical Studies in Leishmaniasis in Palestine,” *Journal of the Palestinian Arab Medical Association* 1, (1945): 7; I. J. Kligler, “Oriental Sore in Palestine, with a Report of a New Endemic Focus,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 17, no. 5 (November 1923): 334–36, <https://doi.org/10.1016/S0035-9203(23)91654-8>). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. Yigal Sheffy, “The Origins of the British Breakthrough into South Palestine: The Anzac Raid on the Ottoman Railway, 1917,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 1 (1999): 124–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399908437746>; Mansour, “Hijaz-Palestine Railway,” 15–16. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. Norris, *Land of Progress,* 34, 38, 46, 113–16. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. Jacob Metzer, *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. Jacob Metzer, “Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Long 1920s: An Exploratory Examination,” *Journal of Israeli History* 27, no. 2 (2008): 223, 233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13531040802284106>. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. For detailed accounts of the ways in which racialized concepts of Jews and Arabs affected British policy and practice towards the two communities, see Norris, *Land of Progress,* 65–68, 74–91; James Renton, “The Age of Nationality and the Origins of the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict,” *International History Review* 35, no. 3 (2013): 586, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2013.795495>. For another example of the way in which these preconceptions impacted the Mandatory authorities’ management of the aftermath of the 1927 earthquake, see Irving, “Donations and Their Destinations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
62. Matan Boord, “Creating the Labor-Zionist Family: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Marriage in Mandate Palestine,” *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2017): 44, 48, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jewisocistud.22.3.02>. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
63. Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 21; Nadav G. Shelef, *Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity, and Religion in Israel, 1925–2005* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
64. Palestine Zionist Executive, the Palestine office of the Zionist Organization during the 1920s. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
65. “Earthquake of 11th July 1927,”’ 61–2. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
66. Irving, “Donations and Their Destinations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
67. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, “An Unlikely Triangle: Philanthropists, Commissars, and American Statesmanship Meet in Soviet Crimea, 1922–37,” *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 3 (June 2003): 355, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24914417>; Jeffrey Lawrence Levin, “Felix Warburg and the Impact of Non-Zionists on the Hebrew University, 1923–1933” (PhD diss., American University, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
68. Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 8, 77, 100–1, 113–19; Levin, “Felix Warburg,” 8–9, 36–43. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
69. “Unemployed Relief Works,” British Government documents related to unemployed relief works in Palestine, folder file CO 733/140/2, pp. 12–14, 25, 93, British National Archives, **London**. Author: is the title ok for you? Also, giving a range of dates would be helpful. We try as best as possible to provide dates on archives, in accordance with Chicago Style – I’ve put the jacket title back in as this would be more useful for a researcher actually trying to trace the same documents, the date range of the letters in the jacket is February 1927 to January 1928. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)