

From the J-Vault: Arab-Jewish Relations, Pre-Statehood

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On a day which saw comedienne Sarah Silverman offer her prescription for Middle East peace at the **Israeli Presidential Conference** -- a conference whose theme is "Tomorrow" -- let's take a look back at the Israel of yesterday, through the eyes of one of America's most important Zionists: **Henrietta Szold**.

This week, from the J-Vault: *Recent Jewish Progress in Palestine* (1916)

While Szold's report is mostly concerned with immigration figures, economic development, urban planning, village life, and other such logistical concerns, one section discusses relations between Arabs and Jews, and makes the reader long for an alternate and peaceful past that did not occur:

In general, the relation between Jews and Arabs is not unsatisfactory, in spite of the friction that occurs at certain points of contact. The reasonable expectation is that it will improve, because the mutual respect is increasing. The Arab has begun to recognize the value that has accrued to him and the land by the presence and the activity of the Jew. He already pays him the flattery of imitation. In some places he has adopted the modern methods and implements introduced by the Jew. On the other hand, the Jew recognizes that the Arab may be his teacher in all that relates to the soil. His fiber is, as it were, habituated to it. He knows it by instinct. For instance, the primitive plow of the Arab husbandman, wielded by his predecessor on the soil three thousand years ago, it was thought must be banished beyond recall. More careful investigation has demonstrated that on some soils deep upturning is harmful; the superficial scratching of the wooden plowshare with its small iron attachment is exactly what is needed. Such recognitions of mutual helpfulness will multiply and make for a better understanding and neighborly tolerance. But that the relation is an aspect of Jewish colonization that will require wisdom and tact and statesmanship can and should not be minimized; nor are the leaders of Palestine public opinion guilty of neglect in this particular.

Szold goes on to describe the presence of a significant number of Russian converts to Judaism. She also predicts that Yemenite Jews, who are "tenaciously and loyally Jewish, intellectually alert," but "Arabic in speech and habit," will be "a cement between Arab and Jew, between the industrially-minded Jew of the city and the agriculturally minded Jew of the country, between Sefardi and Ashkenazi."

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