Partitioning Palestine: British Policymaking at the End of Empire by Penny Sinanoglou. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. 251, index. £30.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-0-226-66578-X.

Penny Sinanoglou's scholarly, interesting monograph views the British Mandate period in Palestine through the lens of territorial partition – the imperial re-shaping (or shattering) of territorial unity into new physical and political forms. This has historical, imperial resonance beyond the case study of Palestine. Framing Palestine's history in this way gives the study under review originality and significance. It forensically dissects the Peel Commission of 1936 and its partition plan a year later but the book's central argument pivots on the backstory to British imperial notions of partition, on the relationship of British rule to the League of Nations and new ideas on nationhood, on how the British considered the two communities in Palestine, and on the afterburn of British plans to partition Palestine in the 1930s as embodied in the UNSCOP plan to partition Palestine in late 1947, prior to the formation of Israel in 1948. This is an imperial history as it is a Palestinian-Israeli-Middle Eastern one, and one embedded in late-Victorian and Edwardian empire as it morphed into the post-First World War world of Wilsonian self-determination. The realpolitik of (p. 180) 'imperial models of imposed order' while genuflecting to the consent and collaboration of the Palestinians and Jews in Palestine tensed British policymakers. Sinanoglou is interested in how partition offered ways of escape for British officials, but also in how the British mediated territorial division considering imperial memory and notions of 'native' populations. Put simply, while the British ruled Palestine as a League of Nations Class 'A' mandate, they saw the Palestinians as they did black African populations and so ruled them as a Class 'B' population. Partition, it was felt, could in some fashion save Palestinians from European Jewish immigrants, arriving, of course, because of British policies to support Zionism (p. 55): 'if Jewish and Arab civilizations were so far removed from each other, it would only be natural for them to inhabit separate physical spheres, so that the one group could develop and thrive and the other could be protected.' The British struggled to square the circle of protection of the Palestinians with support for the (largely non-British) white Jewish immigrants who, unlike other white imperial Dominions, did not fit the (p. 19) 'imagined imperial community.'

Even before the Woodhead Commission of 1938 and the 1939 White Paper did away with partition, British officials did not speak as one on the subject. Sinanoglou teases out (p. 12) the policies that 'pushed *against* partition: the powerful assumption of territorial unity in the mandate, the strenuous efforts of many British politicians and officials to work against partition and to create a single polity….The bureaucratic, institutional and political structures of the British empire ensured that policy was the product of substantial discussions, debates, and power struggles between different faction *within* the British establishment.' These discussions and what we can glean from them provide an empirical richness to the text. Partition was not built into the DNA of the Mandate but was a policy choice of the 1930s, and one built on thinking about the matter in the 1920s, a little studied topic. Sinanoglou argues that from the beginning of the Mandate, Zionists had good links with British colonial career officials, and they seeded the idea of territorial separation. By the mid-1930s, the Colonial Office was not only familiar with the idea of partition in Palestine, but now saw it as a policy option that would fulfill the Balfour Declaration and save the Zionist project from obliteration in a unitary state under majority rule. The idea of partition was not new to British planners who placed it side-by-side to other imperial hotspots, and Sinanoglou usefully threads this wider imperial story through her book. The British had partitioned Bengal in 1905 and there was the formative example of Ireland in 1921, the latter presenting a relatively painless example of successful territorial division (at least until the 'Troubles' started in 1969). British policymakers also had within easy mental reach experience of land scale restrictions based on race (Kenya), and forced population transfer (Greece-Turkey). The threads linking Palestine partition to imperial tradtions were (p. 33) 'remarkably strong. But they were also quite pliable, allowing administrators to change tack from Kenyan-style plans to restrict land sales or set up native land reserves to a more Bengali- or Irish-style partition. In the world of late 1930s British imperial planning, partition was a seen as a way to reduce the costs associated with policing restive populations while simultaneously retaining critical imperial assets such as ports, oil pipelines, airfields, and, in the case of Palestine, symbolically loaded religious sites.' Meanwhile, politicians who headed commissions to Palestine such as John Hope Simpson in 1929 had worked with Greek refugees in the 1920s and so understood population 'transfer.' Such

thinking presaged the partition of India in 1947. The Palestinians, as with so much else, were poorly prepared, not helped by the League in Geneva in the late 1920s having no Arabic translators for Palestinian petitions opposing partition.

Britain toyed with 'cantonization' as early as 1929 – the Swiss model with cantons joined in a federation, contra partition with its creation of new, independent states. Partition in Palestine could solve with a 'clean cut' the three intractable problems facing the High Commissioner in Jerusalem of representative government, land sales, and immigration. By the time that Lord Peel arrived in Palestine in 1936 after the Palestinian ceasefire during the Arab revolt, cantonization had given way to its (p. 60) 'more extreme cousin, partition.' As Sinanoglou strongly argues, historians are wrong to frame the Peel Report of 1937 to partition Palestine as the starting point to the narrative on partition; instead, Peel's conclusions were the outcome of a long-running (p. 62) 'dialogic continuum' about the configuration of Palestine. The lengthy account here of the Peel Commission deliberations unpacks how the final report drawn up in the main by the academic member Reginald Coupland gave coherence and eloquent form to an inchoate set of pre-existing shared assumptions. Sinanoglou pushes against the idea that the Peel Report was a watershed event, presenting it instead as a moment when a (p. 105) 'wide range of parties came before the commission in Jerusalem and vented, argued, praised and condemned the mandate, painted visions of the future, and decried injustices of the past. This alone was unprecedented in the history of mandatory Palestine…. the Peel Commission provided an arena in which both camps could test their political mettle.' Moreover, the Peel Report was not a unanimous one. Members of the Commission opposed partition, but this dissent was lost in the seemingly undisputed final report drawn up by Coupland who placed partition front and centre.

A year after the Peel Report, with the Munich crisis (and war in Europe) brewing, London did a volte face and got rid of partition. This is the subject of the penultimate chapter of the book under review, and proves, if such things need proving, that national self-interest was the ultimate guide to British foreign policy. With war looming, Britain needed Arab support and so it put partition back in the drawer. Or as Sinanoglou describes it (p. 130): 'we should not confuse this change in

policy with a reversal in principles. Partition's primary appeal for most British officials, planners, and politicians had lain in its potential to maintain imperial priorities. Partition collapsed in this period because enough British officials came to see it as endangering the British empire.' A sub argument to emerge here is that many Zionists also opposed partition, or at least in the form envisaged by Peel, as its territorial limits were insufficiently maximal. The book's conclusion is a chapter in itself that takes the story forward to the UN partition plan of November 1947 that built on, it is claimed, ideas from Peel and Woodhead a decade earlier (p. 174): 'Building on a long British history of partition planning therefore had both material and ideological ramifications for the UN planners. On a practical level, UNSCOP had models to tweak, revise or abandon, statistics on which to base its work, maps and plans, and even input from those who had been instrumental in the work of the proposed partition ten years earlier.'

Sinanoglou is to be congratulated for her study of imperial partition plans and whose immediate focus on Mandate Palestine is complemented by a wider examination of British imperial thinking and policy. *Partitioning Palestine: British Policymaking at the End of Empire* is sure to be a welcome addition to the corpus on Mandate Palestine and to wider imperial histories.

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