Possessing the Holy Land: The Palestine Exploration Fund and the American Palestine Exploration Society

Ashley M. Irizarry
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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Possessing the Holy Land: The Palestine Exploration Fund and the American Palestine Exploration Society

Ashley M. Irizarry
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Bachelor of Arts
Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University, 2011

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Master of Arts

__________________________
Ashley M. Irizarry

Approved by the Committee, November, 2013

__________________________
Committee Chair
Associate Professor, Dr. Kathrin Levitan, History
The College of William and Mary

__________________________
Associate Professor, Dr. Tuska Benes, History
The College of William and Mary

__________________________
Assistant Professor, Dr. Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, History
The College of William and Mary
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the interconnections between the British Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), and its American counterpart, the American Palestine Exploration Society (APES or PES). Established around the same time period, these closely aligned organizations operated as partners rather than competitors. The PEF was organized by British archaeologists in 1865 to study Palestine. Its founders sought to remedy what they saw as a gap between spiritual familiarity with the lands of the Bible and scientific knowledge of the region. Inspired by the Palestine Exploration Fund, the American Palestine Exploration Society (APES or PES) was founded five years after in 1870. Modeled closely after the British organization, the PES asserted the same goals and motivations for research; undertaking a scientific study of Palestine in order to provide evidence of the Scriptures and hence, improve spiritual understanding of the Bible.

For both organizations, exploration in the “Holy Land” was a project that reinforced national and religious identity, an assertion of national power and prestige through scientific study. Despite the many similarities between the PES and the PEF, each organization held a different significance for its nation’s identity and reputation. The Fund became useful to Great Britain for imperial purposes, although the PEF did not conceptualize itself as an imperial organization. Its decision to work with the American Society (seen as a non-threatening partner) on the survey of Palestine in the 1870s only highlights the imperial undertones of the British Fund. For the PES, national reputation was at stake; Americans like Edward Robinson had been pioneers in the field of Biblical Geography, and the American Society felt responsible for upholding this legacy. Emphasizing this American “tradition” was especially important in the 1870s when the United States was still recovering from the Civil War; the PES could cultivate much-needed national unity by looking back on American achievements and tapping into a common religious culture.

While the British Palestine Exploration Fund still exists as an organization, the American Palestine Exploration Society lasted less than fifteen years, officially disbanding in 1884. The reasons for the PES’s demise remain contested, but the limited funds, poor results, and the lack of support from the federal government all played a part in the organization’s demise. A comparison of these two societies demonstrate the impact politics had on the survival of scholarly organizations, and displays how some Protestant sought to redefine their Christian faith in light of new scientific knowledge.
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To every student of history.
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Possessing the Holy Land: The Palestine Exploration Fund and
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Introduction

London, 1865: A small cohort of British archaeologists establishes the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), an organization dedicated to the study and excavation of Palestine, more commonly known as “the Holy Land.” The PEF’s founders sought to remedy what they saw as a gap between spiritual familiarity with the lands of the Bible and scientific knowledge of the region:

No country should be of so much interest to us as that in which the documents of our Faith were written, and the momentous events they describe enacted. At the same time, no country more urgently requires illustration. The face of the landscape, the climate, the productions, the manners, dress, and modes of life of its inhabitants differ in so many material respects from those of the western world, that without an accurate knowledge of them it is not too much to say that the outward form and complexion of the events and much of the significance of the records must remain more or less obscure.¹

The PEF had a clear religious motivation for its work, but what made this organization significant was its focus on scientific studies and its use of secular knowledge to advance spiritual understanding. The PEF and contemporary newspapers reporting on the PEF often promoted the organization by asserting that scholarly study would further illuminate Scripture and lead to a deeper understanding of the Bible. The Fund aimed to increase understanding of the Bible by conducting a thorough survey of Palestine² that examined archaeology, the culture of

¹ Original Prospectus of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1865, Prospectus quoted in Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, Our Work in Palestine: Being An Account of the Different Expeditions Sent Out to the Holy Land By the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund Since the Establishment of the Fund in 1865 (New York: Scribner, Welford, & Armstrong, 1873), 13, 14.

² I use the term Palestine as the PEF and their American sister organization did, not in its current usage. Palestine referred to a widespread area in the Middle East where the bulk of Biblical events took place, roughly corresponding to modern-day Israel and the Palestinian territories.
the area’s current inhabitants, geology, topography, and other natural sciences such as Meteorology, Zoology, and Botany.³

Inspired by the Palestine Exploration Fund, the American Palestine Exploration Society (APES or PES) was founded five years later in 1870. Based in New York, the American Society stated similar goals and motivations: to undertake a scientific study of Palestine in order to provide evidence of the Scriptures and hence, improve spiritual understanding of the Bible. The American Palestine Exploration Society’s first quarterly statement, said “[t]he Committee feel that they have in trust a sacred service for science and for religion; and they appeal with confidence to the intelligence and the faith of all who receive the religions of the Bible—whether in the form of Judaism or of Christianity—for the support of this enterprise.”⁴

The PEF was enthusiastic about the Americans joining them in Palestine and proposed that the two organizations work in tandem on exploration.⁵ The PEF was already mapping the area west of the Jordan River, and it was agreed that the American Society would survey the area east of the Jordan. Both groups focused on mapping their respective regions but also did archaeological and antiquities work.

Both the American Society and the PEF were deeply informed by the work of Edward Robinson, an American Bible scholar who published a series of volumes on his travels (two trips in 1838 and 1852) and geographical studies of Palestine. Robinson’s research was perhaps the first modern scientific examination⁶ of Palestine. In American Archaeology in the Mideast, Philip

³ Original Prospectus of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1865, Prospectus quoted in Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, Our Work in Palestine, 15-18.


King writes “Robinson and Smith [who accompanied Robinson in his travels] carried out their explorations with meticulous care, taking exact measurements of all remains and making detailed notes daily. It is a great tribute to their skill and industry that they succeeded in identifying over one hundred biblical sites.” Robinson’s *Biblical Researches in Palestine* became a huge success, published in England and the United States in addition to a German translation. Robinson’s “objective” approach to a region soaked with spiritual meaning inspired a generation of scholars who were eager to expand upon his work in the Middle East. Both the British Fund and the American Society cited Robinson as an inspiration and a significant influence on their research.

The PEF and the PES (or APES) were organized separately and conducted expeditions independently of each other. It makes sense however to examine these organizations together. First, both explicitly drew their inspiration from Robinson’s scientific examination of Palestine. Several other people influenced by Robinson founded their own Palestine exploration groups, for instance the Deutscher Palästina-Verein (German Society for the Exploration of Palestine). Yet, I will only focus on the American and British establishments, because of the close relationship between the two organizations.

The American Palestine Exploration Society was founded as a direct result of the British Palestine Exploration Fund. In his history of the American Palestine Exploration Society, Warren Moulton explains that the organization was founded in 1870 after Rev. James Mullens and Rev. Henry Allon from the British Palestine Exploration Fund spoke in New York City about the current efforts of the Fund. “After paying tribute to the distinguished service already rendered by

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6 I use the term scientific to refer to the use of positivist methods of study that emerged during the Enlightenment and characterized nineteenth-century scholarship.


8 Ibid. 5.
the Americans in the exploration of Palestine, they invited further cooperation ‘in the scientific and catholic measures of the English society.’ Their visit was due doubtless in large measure to the desire to enlist American support.9 Initially the American organization was to be a branch of the British one, but later the Americans decided to found an independent society that would work with the British Fund.

Additionally, the two organizations were in close contact over the course of their formation and during expeditions.10 Felicity Cobbing’s examination of the American Society elaborates that during the Americans’ first expedition to Palestine, Lieutenant Conder of the British exploration invited the apprehensive and unprepared Lieutenant Steever (the military leader of the American party) to watch the British team at work.11 The two organizations also kept in contact via letters over the course of the expeditions, keeping each other informed about their respective progress in mapping Palestine.12

Rather than focusing on specific expeditions and analyzing each organization’s findings, the focus of this thesis will be on the motivations and ideas behind exploration and how these motives fit into the cultural environment that produced them. Why did two similar organizations emerge around the same time? What drove these people to explore Palestine and Syria, regions that were arguably familiar to them (familiar in the sense that they had existing knowledge about the area), instead of a lesser-known region of the world? These exploration projects were ultimately self-affirming for the British and American individuals involved with the project; an

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10 Ibid. 57, 58.


12 Ibid. 13.
opportunity to assert national power and sustain religious belief while also satisfying curiosity. The American Palestine Exploration Society only survived into the early 1880s, but the British Palestine Exploration Fund remains active today. Of course, the Fund’s motivations and purposes have changed over time; this thesis is only concerned with the very early years of the Fund that coincide with the lifespan of the American Society.

Exploration had a self-affirming effect on the British and Americans for similar reasons, yet the United States and Great Britain had different cultural and political situations. Hence, while the American Society stated the same goals as the British Fund, each organization, as well as the public and other groups that supported them, engaged with these common goals very differently.

Existing Literature on the Organizations and Primary Sources

Scholarship on these organizations usually discuss them within the context of Biblical Archaeology. Warren J. Moulton in “The American Palestine Exploration Society,” and Philip King in American Archaeology in the Mideast, study the formation and eventual decline of the PES and its role in the creation of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), an organization dedicated to the study of the Near East.

Most scholars studying these groups connect this history of Biblical Archaeology with the imperial implications of exploration, or the national-religious impetus behind the work of the PES and PEF. Neil Asher Silberman’s Digging for God and Country examines the emergence of Biblical archaeology in the nineteenth century as a cultural, national, and imperial product. Silberman details the political context of the PEF’s exploration, especially in regards to the British government’s relationship with its European rivals and the Ottomans Empire. John James Moscrop in Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the
Holy Land raises the question of whether the explorers and founders of the PEF were even aware of "the underlying imperial rationale for the foundation of the Fund."\textsuperscript{13} Moscrop asserts that imperial motives were almost certainly a factor in Palestine exploration. However, religious faith was a very real motivation, "[t]hey would have seen little or no distinction between their beliefs and the expansion of British interests that followed inexorably upon the work of the Fund."\textsuperscript{14} While these studies examine the PEF’s religious motives, the PEF’s theological views are treated as secondary to the imperial and national implications of the PEF’s work. The American Society is a mere byword in Silberman and Moscrop’s books, in part because these works focus on European imperialism. More importantly however, the achievements of the British Fund have overshadowed the short-lived American PES. Seen as a failure by its own members\textsuperscript{15} as well as the PEF, the organization seems easy to forget. In Rachel Hallote’s Bible, Map, and Spade: The American Palestine Exploration Society, Frederick Jones Bliss, and the Forgotten Story of Early American Biblical Archaeology, she asserts that these significant American contributions to the field have been overlooked in favor of the British story.\textsuperscript{16} The PES in particular has been forgotten, Hallote writes, "the APES’s [PES] contribution has been deliberately erased, due to embarrassment over its failure."\textsuperscript{17} Hallote attempts to correct this perception by reasserting the importance of American contributions, such as the PES’s study of eastern Palestine, to the field of nineteenth-century Biblical Archaeology.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 3.
\textsuperscript{15} Moulton, "The American Palestine Exploration Society," 55.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 67.
Felicity Cobbing also defends the PES’s work in her article, “The American Palestine Exploration Society and the Survey of Eastern Palestine.” Cobbing maintains that despite the Society’s failure, it was a pioneering project, “[t]he first concerted effort to produce a scientifically accurate survey of Transjordan.”

Other scholarly works on the PES do not analyze the organization exclusively but rather, consider the PES within the larger context of nineteenth-century American religious culture, specifically the American fascination with the Holy Land. The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture by John Davis clarifies the connections between American religion, nationalism, and the terrain of the Holy Land by studying art and American travelers to Palestine, amongst them the PES expeditions. Lester Vogel examines Holy Land tourism, colonial interests in, missionary work, politics, and archaeological surveys of the region, namely the American Palestine Exploration Society. Like Davis, Vogel explores the relationship between American religious identity and archaeology.

As Hallote observes, the PES’s short lifespan and its “failure” to produce lasting results have made it forgettable. Understandably, scholarship on the British organization is much more extensive than on the American one. Additionally, studies typically concentrate on one or the other organization. Although Cobbing and Hallote explore the relationship between the PEF and PES, most scholarship provides a less balanced view of the two organizations.

Indeed, presenting an evenly balanced examination of the two organizations is difficult since the PES was so short-lived and produced much less material for study than the extant PEF. Even when limiting the time span of study to the PES’s lifetime, the PEF still published more articles and findings than the American Society. Many of these were published in their respective

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quarterly statements,\textsuperscript{19} which contained meeting minutes, letters from expedition members, articles on their recent finds, notes on geography, climate, and flora, and lists of subscriptions and donations. Articles in these statements usually analyzed the significance of recent discoveries to the Biblical narrative.

Besides the quarterly statements, a book published by the PEF in 1873 will also be examined. The PEF’s \textit{Our Work in Palestine, Being An Account of the Different Expeditions Sent Out to the Holy Land} gives wonderful insight into the Fund’s methodology and religious aims. This account provides a detailed report of the archaeological work done by the PEF since its founding in 1865. Included in this book is information about Captain Warren’s excavations, geological and topographical information, and even anthropological information about the current residents of Jerusalem and Palestine. The American Society never published a book on its research, but a pamphlet issued in 1873 listing the Society’s membership, advisory committee, and executive committee provides insight into their motivations.

This thesis also utilizes American newspapers commenting on the PEF and PES. Surprisingly the American papers reported more frequently on the British Fund than on the American Society. Several reasons may account for this coverage bias. Perhaps there was less to cover on the American Society. The organization was still figuring out important details of exploration, and stories about big finds were a long time coming until the Society could get on its feet. Because the PEF had been around for some time and had far more information to report on. The PEF was also better known than the American Society, so newspapers were more likely to report on them (for the sake of readership). Finally, the public was eager to hear about Holy Land exploration, and whether the discoveries were made by the British or the Americans

\textsuperscript{19} Quarterly statements were issued every few months beginning in 1869 for the PEF. The first American statement was issued in 1871.

A small collection of letters written between the PES president Dr. Roswell Hitchcock and members of the American Geographical Society (AGS) in the 1870s was also used in order to understand how the PES interacted with related organizations. This thesis will attempt a more balanced comparison between the British Palestine Exploration Fund and the American Palestine Exploration Society, exploring the differences and the connections between their religious beliefs, national identity, and imperial ambitions. Whereas other studies have mainly concentrated on one organization, this study will give equal focus to both these organizations. Such a comparison shows how unique cultural and political situations produced the same phenomenon. Examining these organizations as isolated incidences ignores the close connections the PEF and PES had and the cultural interconnections between Great Britain and the United States. The fact that the organizations worked as partners, not rivals, speaks to the relationship between the two countries. Despite differing political situations, shared religious values gave rise to nearly identical organizations and enabled a partnership in a venture that was arguably, an imperial project that mainly benefited the British. And although the organizations bonded over shared cultural traits, their partnership was as much a product of international rivalry as it was of
cooperation. Preoccupied with imperial rivals in Europe, the British saw the Americans as a safe partner since its government had no serious imperial claims to Palestine.

Palestine Exploration and the Public

Some of the groups the two organizations worked with included Bible scholars, clergymen, churches, academics, and other scholarly organizations. For instance, the PES partnered with the American Geographical Society (AGS) since the two societies had a mutual interest in Palestine exploration. The British organization enjoyed the support of the Royal Engineers and benefitted from its members’ military background. The Americans on the other hand had trouble obtaining military and engineering assistance, a problem that contributed to the organization’s demise by the 1880s.

A lack of public interest may have also played a role in the American organization’s short lifespan. There was more coverage of the British Fund than the American organization; this fact may reflect the success of the Fund in achieving recognition, but should not be an indicator that the American Society went unnoticed. Americans were proud to have their own organization, but financial support for the PES was rather localized. The PES Committee lamented that “[l]iberal subscriptions [to the PES] were made in New York city; but from the country at large, in spite of repeated and urgent appeals for help, contributions came in very slowly.”

Both organizations relied on donations, and subscriptions to their publications, which of course, depended on an interested public audience. Newspapers gave updates on new

20 See Letters from Archives of the American Geographical Society (AGS) 1871-1877.


discoveries; the steady coverage not only fed the public’s appetite for details on Holy Land exploration, but also kept interest in PEF and the PES high. Asher Silberman in *Digging for God and Country* explains the important part public interest played in the formation of the Palestine Exploration Fund:

Public response to the official British exploration of Jerusalem was so positive that George Grove [a leading advocate and scholar of Biblical archaeology] decided the time was right to organize a permanent society for the exploration of Palestine….George Grove gathered together some of the most prominent Biblical scholars and church leaders in Britain for an executive meeting in Westminster Abbey, at which they drew up plans to be presented to the public in May. Contributions soon began to flow into the treasury of the embryonic exploration society.²³

Interestingly, American papers reported more frequently on the British Fund rather than on the American Society. The publicity (and at times, lack thereof) in turn translated into financial support. American newspapers provided detailed reports of the PEF’s findings while such coverage was less frequent for the America Society, perhaps contributing to the PES’s funding problems.

**Sister Societies: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Imperialism**

Like its sister organization, the PEF faced constant financial troubles in its early years. The PEF had plenty of small contributors throughout the Great Britain, but the PEF committee was often forced to discontinue work for lack of money. Lieutenant Charles Warren, head of the excavations in Jerusalem, used his own money to continue excavation after the PEF committee stopped sending funds.²⁴ Ultimately, the British Fund survived with the added assistance of the government and the British War Office. In *Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the Holy Land*, John Moscrop explains how the military worked


through the PEF, “Britain, through PEF, had taken over the Western Survey [of Palestine] which was of far more importance....The War Office needed the survey urgently, and Wilson25 had to act at speed, such a speed that he even surprised the British authorities.”26 The PEF did not begin as an imperial organization, but the surveying project, in which the PEF worked with the Royal Engineers in order to produce a map usable for the military, reveals how a scholarly organization could be turned to imperial uses.

Despite Great Britain’s imperial objectives in the Middle East, the PEF did not make direct political or territorial claims to Palestine. Yet, the PEF was protective of its archaeological work and was anxious about another country taking over excavation:

To abandon these works at such a moment would be most lamentable; it would be to proclaim to America, to Germany, and to France, that England—the country where the Bible has been most loved and most studied—will not from her great wealth spare a few thousands yearly to carry on the work of elucidating and explaining the Bible history. The Committee will not, however, believe that the work will be allowed to stop, and that other nations are to have the glory of completing what England has begun.”27

This sense of urgency highlights the underlying national competition in the nineteenth century between European nations. European rivalries surfaced in 1871 with the proposal to map Palestine and Syria. The newly-created American Palestine Exploration Society was a good opportunity to protect the PEF’s work (and British interests) from other European nations who might move into Palestine with their own exploration projects. Moscrop argues in Measuring Jerusalem that international rivalry explains Britain’s willingness to share the surveying project with the Americans:

25 Captain Wilson was an officer in the Royal Engineers and in 1871, headed the survey of west Palestine. See John James Moscrop, Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the Holy Land (New York, NY: Leicester University Press, 2000), 95.

26 Ibid. 96.

[B]y giving the Eastern Survey to America [it] effectively stopped the work being acquired by any other country, particularly France or Prussia….The Americans acted as a block in the east to any other state interfering in Wilson’s [surveying] project.28

The British Fund viewed the Americans as collaborators rather than as competitors in the exploration and survey project. Moscrop insinuates that the PEF and the War Office conducting the survey felt this way because the Americans were not seen as a threat to British interests in the Middle East. Moscrop writes that the “PEF had the experience and the contacts to allow them to take part in a survey that was to be to Britain’s advantage and would allow [the] PEF to take command of the overall survey, including American work, in the east.”29 According to Moscrop, the American team’s lack of experience and resources made the PES non-threatening to the British organization. The PEF’s interactions with the American team in Palestine only bolsters Moscrop’s assertion since the British exploration team offered advice to the Americans when they arrived in Palestine in 1873. On the Americans’ first expedition to Palestine in 1873, Lieutenant Steever30 met with the head of the British team, Captain Wilson, asking for advice, and he noted that he “[h]a[d] met with marked courtesy from the English Palestine Exploration Fund. Had an interview with Captain Wilson [of the PEF] yesterday. He was very obliging, and seemed quite anxious to aid us in whatever manner he could.”31 According to Lieutenant Steever’s reports, the British team members were friendly with the PES expedition and freely offered advice on mapping and navigating the region.


29 Ibid. 96.

30 Lieutenant Edgar Z. Steever Jr. was the military officer in charge of the first American Expedition to Palestine, 1873.

I would also argue that the Fund saw the PES as a safe partner because the Americans had been such enthusiastic supporters of the PEF since its formation. Before the creation of the PES, a PEF chapter group existed in the United States, and the American press eagerly followed news on the Fund’s activities. The PEF praised U.S. support and welcomed American interest in the PEF’s archeological work:

The Committee are very gratified in being able to announce that the cause of the Palestine Exploration Fund is being advocated in America....In Chicago, the ‘Advance,’ a paper of large circulation, has kindly thrown open its columns to the advocacy of the Fund. It is most gratifying to find that the labours of Lieutenant Warren are not only properly valued on the other side of the Atlantic, but that they are also likely to meet with solid assistance, as well as sympathy.32

This enthusiasm for the British Fund’s work eventually translated into the PES, an organization that was closely modeled after the PEF. Far from viewing the British Fund as rivals, the American Society deeply admired their “parent” organization. The PES promoted the Fund’s discoveries in their own publications and praised the British Fund for its discoveries and dedication. Coordinated efforts, such as the decision to split the surveying project, demonstrate that the two organizations viewed each other as partners rather than rivals. National cooperation, not competition marked relations between the two. The American group’s wholehearted support for the PEF, in addition to their inexperience, and willingness to accept the PEF’s decisions about where to survey, made it the perfect partner for the PEF, who wanted to maintain preeminence in Palestine.

The British society did not perceive the new organization as a threat, but as a partner in exploration, William Thomson of the British Fund wrote to the chairman of the American Society:

I desire to express our cordial wishes that the two societies may heartily co-operate in this important work. It is with the greatest pleasure that we anticipate the working, side by

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side, of our two nations, to whom the Bible is especially dear, and to whom its words are familiar from the same translation.33

As William Thomson expressed in his letter, British and Americans shared important traits that made them natural allies in exploration. While other nations were perceived as rivals in Palestine exploration, Great Britain and the United States felt a connection based on a common language, and more importantly, their shared religious views. However, this sense of a shared culture and language only went so far. Each organization viewed itself as representative of its country, as such, success was an assertion of national power and prestige.

Nationalism and Exploration

Although the American Society was less engaged with the international rivalries that preoccupied the PEF, a strong sense of national pride pervaded its publications. PES (and the PEF) utilized nationalistic rhetoric to promote and fund their work:

It is hardly too much to say that our national reputation is at stake. What we have done in former years for geography, and especially for the geography of Palestine, compels us now to do more. Robinson, Smith, Lynch, Thomson and Barclay, have put us under bonds to do our best. The laurels they have won for us must not now be lost.34

According to both organizations, as Bible-loving people, British and Americans possessed a natural curiosity about the lands of the Bible. Financially supporting the organizations was portrayed as a patriotic duty as well as a religious one. For the British, the failure of their organization would be a national shame and another nation would surely take up the work; “there can be little doubt that if the work is abandoned owing to the want of support in England, some

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34 Palestine Exploration Society, The Society was organized a little more than two years ago, to co-operate, in generous rivalry, with the British "Palestine Exploration fund" in a thorough scientific survey of the Holy Land ... [List of Members of the Society. [New York 1873], Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division (New York, NY: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Society 1873), 3.
other nation will take it in hand and carry it out vigorously to the end."

Exploration was a matter of national pride, the PEF committee proclaimed that “there must be intelligence, piety, and wealth enough in England—as well as national pride and national determination—to contribute to the continuance of the researches which attract general sympathy and attention.”

The American Society felt especially pressured to sustain work in Palestine since the Americans had been pioneers in the field of Biblical Geography:

We do not here speak of the obligations of Biblical science to explorers from other nations….who have followed in the path opened by Robinson; for the object of this brief paragraph is not to give a résumé of modern explorations in Palestine, but to recall Americans to their duty in a field where their own countrymen were pioneers, and where American scholarship and enterprise have won such distinguished merit. If of late years we have suffered France, Germany, and especially England, to lead us, their successes should stimulate us to an honorable rivalry for a precedence that was once fairly American.

Appeals to patriotism and national duty were ways to establish the political importance of the exploration project. Whereas religious sentiment was a source of inspiration, national pride was a motivating force. Unlike its British counterpart, the PES served no imperial function for the United States since the country did not have the same overt imperial aims in the Middle East as the British. Formal diplomatic ties between the United States and the Ottomans had only been established in 1831 when American merchants wanted to trade in the Mediterranean Sea.

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American missionaries quickly established themselves throughout the Ottoman Empire, and in 1857, a permanent U.S. consul was created in Jerusalem. Americans also traveled to the Middle East as “religious” tourists; others, driven by Christian Millenarian beliefs, established agricultural settlements in Ottoman Palestine during the 1850s and 1860s. Far from supporting these settlements, the American government discouraged these groups from settling in Palestine, especially since the American consul in Jerusalem could not guarantee diplomatic protection or physical security for settlers. Tourists, missionaries, and religious settlements characterized American activity in the Ottoman Middle East. The PES could even be viewed as part of this religious-based activity, rather than an instrument of imperialism. Instead, the PES was a way to foster national feeling at a time when the country was seeking to redefine itself as a unified nation. Organized only five years after the end of the American Civil War, the PES portrayed itself as a national organization, and presented exploration in Palestine as matter of the country’s reputation. Lieutenant Steever wrote home to the Society about the lack of money for the expedition, “[i]t will be an everlasting shame, if the American people allow this expedition to come to grief. It is truly a noble work, and one that I believe God will prosper.”42 In a pamphlet


41 One example of this type of religious-agricultural settlement was a colony in Jaffa led by George Adams from Maine. Difficulties with the climate and farming conditions in Palestine, as well as opposition from the United States Consul in Jerusalem, led to the colony’s collapse in 1867, only a year after its creation. Ruth Kark, “Millenarism and agricultural settlement in the Holy Land in the nineteenth century,” Journal of Historical Geography, 9, 1, (1983): 58.

42 Steeever, “Our First Year in the Field,” 43/104.
promoting the organization, the Society proclaimed itself a national organization, and called upon the entire country to support their work:

New York city has responded liberally to our call and will no doubt continue to do so. But we now earnestly appeal to the whole country to help us. Let other cities organize auxiliary societies. Let rich men everywhere, without waiting to be called upon, send in their contributions. Let no one think the little he can do is of no account. . . . We entreat the scholars of the country to rally promptly to our support.43

Newspapers throughout the country publicized the PES and contributions came from all over the United States: New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, California, Indiana, New Hampshire, and Louisiana.44 Despite national appeals, the majority of these contributions came from New England states, especially New York where the Society was formed. All of the committee members originated from these states as well. Only one member, W.W. Patton of Chicago, came from the Midwest, none of the committee members came from southern or western states.45 Judging from contributions, the PES had a somewhat localized reach. Yet, the Society aspired to develop a truly national organization that built upon Americans’ previous work in Palestine. The PES committee wrote, “[t]he appeal lately made to the public spirit and national pride of Great Britain concerning maritime discovery and survey applies with equal force to Americans concerning exploration in the Holy Land.”46

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43 Palestine Exploration Society, The Society was organized a little more than two years ago, to co-operate, in generous rivalry, with the British "Palestine Exploration fund" in a thorough scientific survey of the Holy Land, 2.


46 American Explorers in Palestine,” 7/16.
National and Religious Identity

National support for the PES was not only generated by reminding Americans of their past achievements in the field of Biblical Geography, but also through appeals to common religious values shared by all Americans. For both the British and Americans, national identity was closely linked to Protestant Christianity. Although there was diversity in religious beliefs, Protestantism provided a common culture and deeply influenced national ideals and rhetoric. In *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism*, Eitan Bar-Yosef analyzes British nineteenth-century religious faith in connection to imperialism as well as nationalism, asserting the centrality of Biblical culture “in the construction of Englishness”\(^\text{47}\) Widespread familiarity with the Bible and Christian beliefs created a common cultural touchstone that could be utilized for national and imperial purposes. Bar-Yosef claims that “the divine promise….defined not only the English encounter with Palestine, but the imperial ethos as a whole.”\(^\text{48}\) Religious culture informed imperial conquest and was the basis for an “English cultural imagination”\(^\text{49}\) that tied religious beliefs and practices to national identity.

Protestantism was also highly influential in American cultural life. Lester I. Vogel in *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* states that “American attachment to the Bible is a good example of the influence of Protestantism in America prior to World War I….Familiarity with biblical events, personages, and locales was widespread among the American people simply because of the near-universal popularity of Bible


\(^{48}\) Ibid. 10.

\(^{49}\) Ibid. 11.
Furthermore, Protestantism and this familiarity with the Bible played into the American conception of national identity. "Another aspect of American preoccupation with the Bible was the tendency to locate the American nation within the Bible’s prophecies." This tendency to superimpose the American landscape upon the Biblical landscape turned the Bible into a “mirror” in which Americans:

[S]aw their lives as typological reflections of the people and events that constituted the Old World Zion. The history of the Holy Land was at once a guide, a template, and a warning. If the Bible did not provide a complete prescription for the development of the American nation, it nevertheless demonstrated the possibilities and made predictions about its eventual outcome.

Nineteenth-century American identity was inextricably tied to religious belief, and the identification with the Holy Land came “not from a desire to emulate or remain within the past, but from the applicability of the concept to a uniquely sanctioned future." For Americans, this concept of a “uniquely sanctioned future” was especially apt in the conquest of the continent; like the ancient Israelites entering Canaan, Americans were destined to possess the land. The American landscape reflected the Holy Land while the Holy Land reflected the American nation, exploring Palestine would supplement religious belief, and in turn, reveal something about the American nation itself.

**Conceptualizing the Holy Land: The Bible in PEF and PES Publications**

Affirming national reputation and identity were significant motivations for the two organizations, but the need to reassert religious faith was the main rationale for the PES and the

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53 Ibid. 15.
PEF's existence. The Palestine exploration societies articulated a strong religious focus for their work, with members' Christianity serving both as an inspiration, and as an objective for research. In a letter to the Chairman\textsuperscript{54} of the newly-created American society, President of the Palestine Exploration Fund, William Thomson (Archbishop of York) wrote:

> Our aim is nothing less than the collection and diffusion of every particle of information from the Lands of the Bible, yet remaining to be secured, which can throw light on the pages of the Sacred Book.\textsuperscript{55}

Yet, while both organizations were clear about their Christian motivations, neither was explicit about its religious affiliations or theological viewpoints. The PEF and PES stated religious motivations, but to what extent were these organizations religious? In reviewing publications and even letters written by individual members, ascribing a specific religious identity and corresponding theological ideas to the organizations is difficult. It is possible that the organizations were purposefully vague about religious identity in order to reach a wider audience. For the most part, contemporary newspapers followed their example and promoted the two organizations as beneficial for a general Christian public. According to the organizations themselves, the findings of this Anglo-American project were meant to appeal to \textit{all} Christians and other students of the Bible, including Jews and Muslims. The Palestine Exploration Fund also asserted that its work "attracted universal attention and universal interest, --an undertaking which seems to have united in one common bond all creeds and denominations, of Christians, Jews, and Mahomedans, --an undertaking, not started by any government, but by the spontaneous and enthusiastic free offerings of the people."\textsuperscript{56} In discussing the survey of eastern

\textsuperscript{54} Reverend Joseph P. Thompson, D.D. He served as the first chairman of the Committee for the Palestine Exploration Society.

Palestine, the PEF claims that its survey could even be useful for the purposes of Jewish settlement in Palestine:

*The Jewish Chronicle*, a well-known paper belonging to the Jews of London, and two or three other newspapers in foreign lands, are turning their attention to the East country, not only because of its general interest, but for purposes of future settlement and cultivation. Where they should go and for what exact purpose, is of course not within our province to declare or suggest, but it is, I think, within our province to remember that a Map and a completion of the Memoirs of the East might be even more useful to them than the Map of the Western part.57

This reference to Zionist settlement was not very common amongst the PEF’s publications, most likely it was an attempt to promote the organization as more universally appealing and show that its work had practical applications. Despite their claims to a universal appeal, the organizations possessed a mainly Protestant outlook.58 Their emphasis on Bible-reading reflects a typically Protestant concern. The PEF Committee stated that the PEF was established “[t]o help every one [sic] who cares to read the Bible intelligently, to lead those who care for it little to care for it much, to give light to dark places, to make things hard become easy, to narrow the bounds of controversy.”59 From the viewpoint of the two societies, exploration of “the Holy Land” would improve readers’ understanding of the Bible and thereby increase their Christian faith, particularly in the face of attacks on the Bible’s truthfulness:

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58 There is evidence to suggest that the PEF, at least, also had some Catholic affiliations. For example Dr. Edward B. Pusey, who made significant contributions to the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, was a member of the PEF committee. See Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, “Committee” Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement No. I, January 1 to March 31, 1869 (London: Office of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1869): 13.

Modern skepticism assails the Bible at the point of reality, the question of fact. Hence whatever goes to verify the Bible history as real...is a refutation of unbelief. And, moreover, whatever serves to illustrate the Bible as a Book of realities, to make it real to the minds of youth in the family and the Sunday School, fortifies the rising generation against the assaults of skepticism in later years.\textsuperscript{60}

Another indication of the organizations’ Protestant viewpoint is their engagement with scientific developments, in particular, Darwinian evolution and geological discoveries. According to Claude Welch, Catholics were less concerned than Protestants were about generating theological responses to scientific discoveries. In \textit{Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Volume II, 1870-1914}, Welch asserts that “Roman Catholicism was less troubled than Protestantism by the problem of reinterpretation of scripture and by the commitment to natural theology [i.e. William Paley].”\textsuperscript{61} In regards to Darwin, “the immediate response of Roman Catholic thinkers was restrained, as in the 1860 reviews of Darwin by Richard Simpson and Canon John Morris.”\textsuperscript{62}

Theological responses to scientific development were not nearly as significant for Catholics as they were for Protestants, which suggests that the exploration societies were theologically Protestant.

Furthermore, while the PEF and PES were officially unaffiliated, individual members and donors came mainly from Protestant denominations. Many on the PEF committee were prominent members of the Anglican Church, such as the Archbishop of York, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the bishops of Oxford, Ely, Manchester, Peterborough, and Ripon amongst others.\textsuperscript{63} The PES committee was overwhelmingly Protestant as well.\textsuperscript{64} Despite the fact that the

\textsuperscript{60} Stokes, “Concluding Appeal,” 34/43, 35/44.


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. 185.

\textsuperscript{63} For full list of committee members in 1869, see tables section, \textit{Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement No. 1, January 1 to March 31, 1869} (London: Office of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1869): 13.
organizations were promoted for a general Christian audience, it would be safe to assert that Palestine exploration was an essentially Protestant project.

It is important to remember however, the contested nature of Protestant theology in the nineteenth century. Theological conflict amongst Protestants was primarily over the practice of Biblical criticism (or biblical-historical criticism), which had emerged in Germany during the eighteenth century. Hans Frei explains Biblical criticism in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*:

"[the] Historical-critical method\(^6^5\) meant that putative claims of facts in the Bible were subjected to independent investigation to test their veracity and that it was not guaranteed by the authority of the Bible itself.\(^6^6\) Liberals and conservatives were divided over the literal interpretation of the Bible:

Conservatives argued the factuality [or literal truth] of the events narrated in these stories and the authoritative (because inspired) truth of the written texts. Liberal critics argued that the accuracy and truth of the sacred books have to be subjected to the same criteria of evaluation as all other writings, and that ancient writings containing miracle reports as well as reports of unexperiencable happenings have to be reconstructed in the light of natural experience and explanatory theory.\(^6^7\)

Biblical criticism developed in German universities throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but the “historical question, and thus the question of biblical authority and inspiration,


For full list of society members in 1873, see tables section, *Palestine Exploration Society, The Society was organized a little more than two years ago, to co-operate, in generous rivalry, with the British "Palestine Exploration fund" in a thorough scientific survey of the Holy Land ... [List] of Members of the Society. [New York 1873]*. Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, (New York, 1873).


\(^{6^7}\) Ibid. 18.
was not fully confronted in Britain until the publication in 1860 of...Essays and Reviews."^{68}

Essays and Reviews introduced Biblical criticism to a British audience, provoking a strong reaction amongst conservative Protestants who saw in Biblical criticism a serious threat to traditional readings of the scriptures. In the United States, denominational tensions had reached a new level; this hostility was due in part to “the reassertion, or preservation, of biblical authority and classic theological forms.”^{69} Conservative Protestants in both the United States and Great Britain sought to maintain and defend a literal reading of the Bible; the founders and supporters of the PEF and PES were almost certainly amongst these conservative Protestants. In their eyes, proof of the Bible’s factual accuracy could be found through the study and exploration of Palestine. Studies in geology, geography, anthropology, and archaeology would provide physical evidence to support the Bible’s truths. They fully expected that what they discovered would not only correspond to the Biblical narrative, but would also confirm its literal truth.

Theologically, the PEF and PES were very similar despite the fact that exploration held a different meaning for each organization’s home country. Both engaged with the Bible and viewed the landscape of Palestine in comparable ways. Analyzing their publications show that the PEF and PES engaged with the Bible in three ways: as an inspiration for exploration and research, as a guide for what to study/excavate, and as evidence to support their findings. Central to their theological outlook was a veneration of the landscape. Palestine became as theologically important as the scriptures themselves, a “fifth gospel.”^{70} The Bible was used to interpret the physical landscape, and in turn, the landscape clarified the Bible.

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^{69} Ibid. 190.
The Bible was used chiefly as a source of inspiration for the Palestine exploration project. Religion was the reason for excavating in Palestine, as opposed to some other region of the world. While other areas might have provided more fruitful opportunities for excavation and scientific discovery, the religious connection to Palestine gave the explorers, and every Christian (at least according to the PEF and PES), a personal stake in the project. "Every member of the American Committee for this object has visited the Holy Land, and has, therefore, a personal enthusiasm in the work of exploration."71 They expressed their interest in Palestine with language demonstrating their emotional attachment to the region, "to every one of the chips found in the drift [in Palestine] there attaches a special interest, an interest hallowed by feelings of reverence and sacredness."72 Both the British and American societies reiterated their nations’ deep love for the Bible and their “eager....thirst for every fact that throws light upon the pages of the Old Testament or the New.”73 Their research in Palestine was not simply a desire for information; the project was a religious duty.74 Hence, the PEF and PES viewed exploration as a way to honor God. Members’ reverence for the Bible inspired a highly personal connection to their work in Palestine.


72 Deutsch, "Report of Annual General Meeting, Held at Willis's Rooms, St. James's, 24th June, 1869," 94/159.


The Bible also served the more practical purpose of “guiding” exploration. Although the explorers showed interest in Greek and Roman ruins, the bulk of excavation and mapping focused on areas important to Biblical history. Biblical history was the framework through which the societies interpreted Palestine:

[I]n more sense than one Palestine can be viewed best from the direction whence the great Lawgiver looked upon it. The whole current of Sacred History sets into Palestine from the east [of the Jordan River]; and the relations which Israel had with Edom, Moab, Ammon, Bashan, and the Wilderness, from which they emerged as a new nation, render a thorough exploration of that extensive region almost essential to a right comprehension of some of the most important facts in human history.75

Places like Jerusalem, which was the focus of study during the PEF’s first few years, were a priority for the organizations because of their significance in Biblical stories. Examining these regions would settle disputes over the exact location of sacred sites. Discovering the exact locations of biblical sites such as Herod’s Temple and the walls of Old Jerusalem provided physical evidence of sacred history. Such evidence was crucial for maintaining religious faith:

[T]he moment scientific investigation began the authority of tradition was assailed. We are no longer....of the same temper as those earnest and simple pilgrims who were wont to worship in undoubting faith at every shrine which a monk, credulous himself, pointed out as the scene of some act in the holy history. We no longer behold, with unsuspecting eyes, the spot where our Lord was scourged; and where He suffered we no longer pray, like the pilgrims of the tenth century, for death to strike us swiftly, even while we stand upon soil so sacred. The cold breath of doubt has dispelled the modern traveller’s enthusiasm; nothing seems real, nothing unquestioned, within the narrow limits of the modern walls. Even in the Haram Area, the Area of the Temple, where surely one would expect the most perfect certainty, the conflicting controversies shift the Temple from one spot to another, till we are certain of nothing, save that somewhere here Solomon and Herod built, and Titus destroyed.76

According to this statement, the growth of scientific inquiry had created a new paradigm in which religious traditions and beliefs could no longer stand on their own but required the support of science. What had undermined religious faith was the means by which to revive it.


76 Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, Our Work in Palestine, 46, 47.
The scientific goal of the PEF and PES, however, was not to counteract Darwin or geological discoveries, but to apply scientific methods of study to learn more about the physical landscape of Palestine. Meteorological, botanical, geological, and topographical surveys of Palestine would lead to a deeper understanding of the scriptures. The Palestine Exploration Fund’s prospectus for instance stresses the importance of a geological survey:

The valley of the Jordan and basin of the Dead Sea is geologically one of the most remarkable on the earth’s surface....The decision of the question whether any volcanic changes have occurred round the margin of the lake within the historical period, may throw a new aspect over the whole narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.77

Science then, operated as a tool to increase faith.

The Bible was also important in determining place names. British and Americans referred to sites by their biblical names, while contemporary inhabitants did not, which made confirming the precise location of biblical sites difficult. Discovering the contemporary name for a particular site in order to find its corresponding biblical name was a project begun by the Bible scholar Dr. Edward Robinson78 and continued by the PEF and PES explorers. A map for biblical scholars, said Lieutenant Steeever, “will depend upon the successful identification of the numerous ancient sites; and little can be hoped for in this direction, unless the utmost pains can be taken to obtain....the local Arabic name of every village, ruin, stream, mountain, etc.”79 Most of the photographs taken by the American team picture biblical regions and refer to sites by their ancient names.


Explorers and members of the organizations often described sites by referencing Biblical stories and characters rather than merely describing the physical features of the place. A report from Lieutenant Steever demonstrates this pattern:

Broke camp No. 3 at 8.20 a.m., and shortly afterward passed the ruins of Sarepta. It was here that Elijah, after the brook Cherith had gone dry, came for food, when famine came upon the land, and met the Syrophoenican woman, whose son he afterward brought to life (I. Kings, 17:9). We next passed some ruined columns, and soon afterward, a white-domed wely, a knan, and some water troughs.80

Belden C. Lane in *Landscapes of the Sacred* explains the significance of stories to the creation of a sacred space. “Above all else, sacred place is ‘storied place.’ Particular locales come to be recognized as sacred because of the stories that are told about them….The places become valued in proportion to the number and power of stories that are attached to them….Without exception, the sacred place is the place rich in story.”81 Such biblical stories literally guided explorers through the landscape by highlighting which places were important, and by providing an interpretive framework for viewing Palestine, giving meaning to seemingly mundane and ruined spaces.

Finally, the Palestine exploration societies used the Bible as evidence to support their discoveries. While Palestine provided the means by which to verify the Bible, in turn, the Bible helped make sense of the landscape. As previously mentioned, biblical history gave meaning to an otherwise strange location, “[w]hile waiting for the new policeman, rode around the walls of Tyre [Sur], and most emphatically has the prophecy of Ezekiel (xxvi, etc.) been fulfilled, as testified by the ruined walls and dilapidated towers, with their numerous crevices.”82

80 Steever, “Our First Year in the Field,” 57/117.
82 Steever, “Our First Year in the Field,” 59/120.
Furthermore, the Bible could be used as proof to determine whether a location was in fact a biblical site. In the identification of Mount Pisgah,83 a member of the American Palestine Exploration Society wrote, “[f]inding that this highest crest, Shefá Nebá’, of Nebo, does not fulfil the conditions of the Scripture-narrative, we hasten on to Jebel Nebá’.”84 Lieutenant Warren of the British Fund relied heavily on Scriptural evidence in order to ascertain the specific location of Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem in relation to each other:

The chief information extant on the subject of Jerusalem and Zion is to be found in the historical and poetical books of the Old Testament, the books of the Maccabees, and the works of Josephus.

Of these four sources, the first two are portions of the Inspired Writings, and therefore to them must we look for our most trustworthy information; we must, however, take into account it is proposed to examine the subject entirely from the Historical Books85 first; and for this purpose all the information which could be found bearing on the subject has been extracted.86

Using these Scriptural accounts along with knowledge gained from excavations at Wilson’s Arch and Robinson’s Arch in Jerusalem, Warren drew conclusions about the location of the first Temple and the extent of Jerusalem at the time of King David. In this regard, the Bible was transformed from an instrument of faith into a tool for scientific inquiry. What made this transformation possible however, was the explorers’ faith that the Bible was a trustworthy source of information on the natural world as well as in spiritual matters. Asserting the infallibility of Scripture was important for Protestants who believed that contemporary beliefs threatened traditional views of the Bible. This is not to say that all members of the PEF and PES felt the

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83 Mountain from where Moses viewed the Promised Land before he died.


85 Historical Books of the Bible include: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

same way, but the authority of Scripture was an important element of their theological outlook. Claude Welch writes that “[b]elief in the infallibility of scripture was being deeply eroded in the latter half of the century. One source of evidence for this is the very intensity of the insistence on biblical infallibility that characterized proto-fundamentalism in America….and in the Bible school movement that took root in the 1890s.”87 For the people of the Palestine exploration societies, the Bible was not only a religious text, but a motivation to explore. Members of the two organizations viewed Palestine’s landscape through the lens of the Bible and used the scriptures as an authority on the region’s geography.

Imperialism and Ottoman Palestine

While both Americans and the British connected religious beliefs to national identity and claimed a stake in Palestine based on these beliefs, neither the PEF nor the American PES made direct political or territorial claims to Palestine or asserted imperial motivations. They did however make religious “claims” to Palestine based on their perceived spiritual connection to the place:

We look on Jerusalem now—we English people—as a city that in some measure belongs to us. Do we not every year pour forth in thousands and tens of thousands that sacred Book wherein is written its rise and its fortunes and its fall? May we not naturally say, when we are so largely occupied in spreading its history, that we have in some measure made it our own?88

Members of PEF and the PES were not always satisfied with Ottoman rule in the region. The British Fund in particular was more likely to criticize the restrictions Ottoman officials put on the organization’s excavations in Jerusalem. Palestine had been under Ottoman control since 1516; the Ottoman government had often subdivided the area and incorporated it into other

88 George Grove, “Report of Annual General Meeting, Held at Willis’s Rooms, St. James’s, 24th June, 1869,” 91/156.
administrative regions. Gudrun Kramer states in *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel*, that the Ottomans “frequently altered and adapted their [Palestine’s] boundaries in response to changing political goals and demands,” and, “Ottoman administrative units were mostly relevant for the purposes of taxation.” These administrative districts were run by military governors (given the title *pasha*), and appointed by the Ottoman central government (the Sublime Porte or Porte) in Istanbul. Provinces, or *vilayets* in Ottoman Turkish, were divided into districts (*sanjaks*). In addition to sharia law (Islamic law), *vilayets* were also subjects to another set of laws written for conquered territories by Sultan Suleyman I.

Ottoman administrators were relatively accommodating to the PEF and the American organization, but the PEF sometimes complained about dealing with the Ottoman government and the Palestinians’ lack of cooperation with archaeological work:

Here we are reminded of the numerous and great difficulties to be overcome before even one excavation of this kind can be made in Jerusalem, and of the many different people with whom Lieutenant Warren has to deal. First, there is the Supreme Government, then the local Pasha, the Pope, Patriarch, or Archbishop of Christian sects, the Rabbi and Moslem too, the owners of the soil, the military, the tenants of the houses, the surrounding neighbors, the Consuls of various Powers, the excellent sergeants and corporals of English Engineers, the native workmen.

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91 Lieutenant Charles Warren led the Palestine Exploration Fund’s operations in Jerusalem during the 1860s and early 1870s. Warren frequently contributed his own money to the work when the Fund could not pay to continue excavations.

Ottoman administration and local people (in addition to other foreign powers in Palestine), were interpreted as obstacles inhibiting discovery. The PEF’s most recurrent complaint was the restriction on excavation around the Dome of the Rock (known to the PEF and PES as the Haram area). “The Turkish Government can scarcely be expected to view with favour excavations which lead down to the foundations of their own sacred stronghold in the City, but they cannot well withdraw from the permission accorded to the present explorers.”

The American Society even said that the work would be easier if a Western nation controlled the region:

That this ancient city, so rich in objects of the highest interest, should still remain imperfectly explored, because it is occupied by a few lawless and ignorant inhabitants, is a reproach to European and American civilization, which could easily command, if it wished, acquiescence in more serious matters than a simple permission for an expedition to examine its ruins. The causes which have formerly prevented such a work are by no means insurmountable at present, for Christian power is felt now—even by the Bedouins—and every year is rendering it easier to deal with difficulties which thirty years ago would have appeared insurmountable.

Comments like this however, were infrequent; both organizations remained civil with the Ottoman government and its officials in Palestine. Complaints about working in Palestine were mainly directed against the people in Palestine, not the Ottoman government. This more positive attitude towards the government could be partly explained by the explorers’ dependence on it. They needed government approval to even travel through Palestine, and they relied on the government’s local representatives to facilitate their work. In essence, it was in their best interest to remain in goodwill with the Ottomans since they depended so much on their support.

The political relationship between the explorers’ own government and the Ottoman government may have also shaped their interactions with officials in Palestine. While the United


States had only limited interactions with the Ottoman government, the British government had a closer relationship with them and considered themselves the Ottomans' protector against other European nations that threatened the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity. The Ottomans were not considered equal partners in this relationship, the British often tried to influence Ottoman internal affairs. As the Ottomans' ally and "protector", the British supported them against Russia, which was expanding into Eastern Europe and the Middle East, threatening both Ottoman territory and British India.

Throughout the late 1700s and 1800s, a series of wars between the Ottomans and Russians led to Russian territorial gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth century, the Russian state also encouraged and supported Balkan nationalism in an attempt to undermine the Ottomans and gain Balkan territory. For the British, counteracting the expansion of French, and by the mid nineteenth century, Russian influence, was key to the development of the British policy of keeping the Ottoman Empire intact. For instance, British intervention in the Crimean War was motivated by their concern over Russia's expanding influence in Eastern Europe. An important consequence of the war was the policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire in order to check Russian expansion, thereby maintaining the balance of power in Europe. The British wanted to maintain Ottoman territorial integrity in order to curb Russian influence, particularly in central Asia where Russia was expanding in the period after the Crimean War.

The Eastern Crisis from 1875 to 1878 called into question this policy of supporting Ottoman territorial integrity. Christian peasants in Herzegovina and Bosnia revolted against their

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Muslim landlords and sympathizers in Serbia and Montenegro threatened to escalate the conflict, causing Russia and Austria to get involved. In 1876 the Ottomans brutally suppressed an uprising in Bulgaria, which “changed the whole climate of the crisis because they produced a powerful European revulsion against the Ottoman government.”97 Popular opinion in Britain turned against the Ottomans and the government was divided over whether to continue supporting the Ottomans. Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone’s divergent opinions on the issue encapsulated the dilemma:

Disraeli regarded Turkey as a necessary bulwark against an alleged Russian threat to the route to India. However atrociously the Sultan behaved towards his Christian Bulgarian subjects, Russia must at all costs be prevented from seizing Constantinople. Gladstone's fervent anti-Turkish crusade cut no ice with Disraeli or the Queen. Ethics must give way to Realpolitik, and, as Disraeli was in power, they did.98

The Crisis reaffirmed Great Britain’s commitment to their strategy of using the Ottomans as a way to curtail Russian expansion. And while ostensibly supporting the Ottomans, the British had little faith in the Empire’s ability to survive,99 which in their view necessitated British involvement in order to prevent the complete disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The Middle East (or the Near East, as it was called) was strategically important for the British. Although the British did not directly control the region, establishing themselves as an ally and protector of the Ottomans seemed to be the next best thing.

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96 The “Eastern Question” in the nineteenth century “was the conflict between Ottoman rulers and their Christian subjects...the demand by those subjects for autonomy or independence, the Ottoman resistance to those demands, and the efforts of the major European powers to find a solution to the conflict which would accommodate the desires of both Ottomans and Christians and which would not upset the balance of power in Europe. The problem boiled down to that of preventing the matter being solved in such a manner as to make Russia the predominant power in the whole region. Yapp, “The Eastern Question”, 59.

97 Yapp, “The Eastern Question”, 78.


At the time of the Eastern Crisis, the PEF expedition had returned to London after a violent incident between the PEF and local inhabitants near Safed, Galilee in 1875. Members of the expedition were wounded in the fight, and much of their equipment stolen or damaged. The surveying party informed the British consuls in Beirut and Jerusalem of the “Safed affair” and returned home; refusing to continue the western survey until the Ottoman government punished those responsible. The incident became a matter of national pride, Silberman writes that “imperial Britain regarded it as a serious affront….the Safed affair had taken on a tremendous symbolic significance that had to be resolved before a return to Palestine could even be contemplated.” Pressured by the British, the Ottomans officials punished those involved in the attack, and even had the whole town of Safed pay an indemnity into the PEF’s treasury.

The PEF surveyors returned to Palestine soon after, in 1877, amidst the public controversy over the Bulgarian massacres. Although the British government felt compelled to support the Ottomans after the massacres, they could assert power over their “ally” in other ways, such as in the Safed affair.

The British PEF rarely discussed their country’s political relationship with the Ottoman government, but it is safe to say that this political context had some bearing on the PEF’s attitude towards Ottoman officials in Palestine. With the exception of the Safed affair, the organization made few comments, good or bad, about the Ottomans; the majority of the PEF’s remarks

100 “The Attack upon the Surveying Party of the Palestine Exploration Fund Turns Out to have been quite a Serious Affair,” The Daily Inter-Ocean (Chicago, IL), Aug. 23, 1875. Issue 129, page 5, col. A.

101 Silberman, Digging for God and Country, 121.

102 Ibid. 122.

103 Ibid. 122.

104 The PEF and British government did not necessarily blame the Ottoman government for what happened at Safed, but they did hold the Ottomans responsible for failing to protect the PEF and demanded retribution for what happened.
complimented the Ottoman government for their help. A letter from Emanuel Deutsch, a scholar with the PEF, to the organization’s secretary stated:

I ought not to omit that, in the course of an interview I had with the Pasha of Jerusalem, His Highness repeatedly assured me of the great interest he took in the objects of the Fund, and promised to do the very best in his power to forward the operations.  

The relative lack of comments is surprising considering the fact that the organizations dealt with Ottoman officials on a somewhat regular basis. The difficult political relationship between the British and the Ottomans may explain this silence. The American team was more vocal about their interactions with the Ottomans and seemed to have a generally positive opinion of officials (a stark contrast with their views on the local people). For their part, the Ottomans were mostly helpful; the government in Istanbul granted each organization a firman, and the local government promised to protect and facilitate the explorers’ travel:

Translation of the Bouyouldi granted by His Excellency, Halat Pacha [Pasha], Governor General of Syria, to the American Palestine Exploring Expedition. ‘As in these days an American Expedition, composed of honorable persons, under command of Lieutenant E. Z. Steever, a distinguished officer of the United States Army, has arrived for the purpose of traveling in certain countries within the Province of Syria, in order to examine the water; the climate, and the land of Syria, its position, its ancient monuments, and its natural history, provided that they do not remove the ancient monuments which they may discover, but shall be content only to see them. Therefore we request the Mutessarifs of districts, the Caimacams of the departments, the officers employed for guarding the public roads, the Chiefs of villages, in the countries throughout which the Expedition shall pass and visit, to treat said persons very respectfully, and to furnish them with everything which they may require whether for eating or drinking, at the usual prices; and especially to take every precaution for their personal protection, to send with them the military police from place to place, so that they may return happily and safely. This order has been given for the aforesaid purpose by the Administrative Council of the Province of Syria, to be acted and decided upon carefully. Damascus, 18 Mularum, 1290, A. H. (17 March, 1873 A.D.).’  

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105 Emanuel Deutsch to George Grove, Esq., Hon. Secretary “Letter of Mr. Emanuel Deutsch: On the Characters Found by Lieut. Warren at the S.E. Angle of the Haram Area,” 37/76.

106 A document issued by from the Porte in Istanbul that allowed the explorers to travel and excavate in Palestine.

Local officials provided "policemen" to escort the team, "[w]e were accompanied by a mounted policeman, furnished by Kiamil Pasha, Governor of Beirut." At times governors even intervened on the explorers' behalf in disputes with local inhabitants, "[o]n my return, I [Lieutenant Steever, who led the American team in 1873] was greatly surprised to find that nothing had been done, and, not wishing to be ruled by the muleteers, had them brought up before the Governor, and their true duty instilled into them." On another occasion, Ottoman soldiers were sent to protect the British team after a fight broke out between them and several locals near the Lake of Galilee.

Explorers and Local Inhabitants

Disputes between the explorers and the local Palestinians were common, particularly since explorers dealt with the people on a regular basis. Locals served as guides, translators, and workers, as well as providing accommodations for the explorers when they traveled. Additionally, the explorers had to receive permission from the owner of the property if they wanted to dig in or around a person's home, a stipulation that limited excavation and often annoyed the PEF explorers.

In letters from the field, Warren and the other excavators and scholars seldom discussed their interactions with the people; aside from passing comments about workers and dealing with reluctant property-owners; the Palestinian people are hardly present in their writings. In contrast,

108 Steever, "Our First Year in the Field," 68/129.
109 Ibid. 68/129.
110 "The Attack upon the Surveying Party of the Palestine Exploration Fund," The Daily Inter-Ocean, page 5, col. A.
writings by the American team are full of details about the Palestinians, local customs, and the terrain they traveled. The PEF seemed more focused on excavation and analyzing the biblical and archaeological significance of their findings. This is not to say that the Americans did not care about excavating, but their writings reflect a preoccupation with the people they met. Since the American team spent most of its time traveling instead of excavating in Jerusalem (as the PEF did), it interacted with rural people rather than those in cities.

Much of the population in Palestine and Syria were rural rather than urban-dwellers. The rural population included nomadic groups (various Bedouin tribes) as well as sedentary peasant farmers. However, in A History of Palestine, Kramer explains that the line between “settled” peasant farmers and nomadic groups was flexible. “[W]e should recall the shift from the sedentary existence of peasants into a nomadic or seminomadic life that permitted them to withdraw from the control of the state, local landowners, or Bedouin sheikhs.” More settled lifestyles were becoming the norm by the nineteenth century. The trend towards sedentarization was strongly encouraged by Ottoman officials who held a strong anti-Bedouin bias “shared by Ottoman officials and European observers alike...[a]t its core lies the notion of Bedouin banditry and lawlessness that depicts them as the chief danger to public security and a settled lifestyle, or civilization.” The Bedouins’ mobility made it hard for Ottoman officials to effectively control or tax them; and caravans and settled areas (such as Jerusalem) were also subject to attack from Bedouins. Despite the anti-Bedouin attitude and conflict with Bedouin

112 Hathaway, The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule, 186.

113 Kramer, A History of Palestine, 50.

114 Ibid. 50.

115 Ibid. 49.
tribes, the Ottoman government often worked with them and relied on them to protect roads, trade routes, and pilgrimages traveling from Damascus to Mecca.

The Americans seemed to share this anti-Bedouin stance, Lieutenant Steever grumbled about the inconveniences posed by the Bedouins:

Heretofore educated travelers have met with so many obstacles while passing through these districts that anything like adequate exploration has been impracticable….the habitually predatory character of the Bedouins of the plains, and their greed for tribute….have each, in turn, compelled the explorer to forego nearly every advantage which his visit could afford.”116

The PES explorers had an overall negative opinion about all the native people they encountered, repeatedly complaining about beggars, slow and uncooperative guides, incompetent policemen, thieves, nosy locals, inefficient and corrupt officials, and the “secretive” and “suspicious” behavior of people unwilling to assist the explorers. They believed that the people were unnecessarily suspicious of the explorers, possessing an “unreasoning jealousy” and could “scarcely be persuaded that the object of visiting old ruins, at great risk and expense, is not for the purpose of abstracting treasures hidden there.”117 The Americans interpreted the people as obstacles to exploration; they felt entitled to freely explore Palestine, and demanded nothing less than the complete cooperation of Ottoman officials and the Palestinians.

More than that, locals were seen as threatening, untrustworthy, and uncivilized; a people who spoiled the Holy Land and were unworthy of living in it. Steever described a town the team visited as “cramped; its streets mere narrow; crooked and filthy alley ways. The inhabitants dirty and boisterous.”118 And in another, mountainous region, Steever wrote that a “castle crowned its height, ruins were scattered below, the dirty looking hovels of the natives cling to the hill-side,


117 Ibid. 27/36 and 29/38

118 Steever, “Our First Year in the Field,” 59/120.
and pools of stagnant water lay at the base: all these truly represented an oriental village.”¹¹⁹ The Americans’ virulent distaste for the people stemmed partially from the belief that as Christians, they held an inherent right to the land. Their attitudes were also informed by Western ideas about Muslims and “oriental” peoples which saw these groups and their cultures as inferior to Western people.

On the other hand, the local people were also interpreted as descendents of ancient and great biblical tribes. Viewed as “living history,” these people could supposedly offer clues about ancient customs. Steever depicted a sparsely inhabited region and the Bedouins living there:

This district bears in the Bible the familiar name of Bashan, now termed the Hauran….its pastures and groves of oaks still bear out the Biblical frame of Bashan, though its plains are given up to the Bedouins, and its mountains to the most warlike and lawless population of the East. Nature seems to have fashioned the land for the special purpose of affording places of refuge for human outlaws as well as wild beasts. There is probably no other equally extensive district where volcanic action has thrown up rocks and formed crevices and difficult passages so fitted for a race of Ishmaelites as is the Hauran.¹²⁰

Both the exploration societies perceived the people as a way to further explicate biblical history, evidence that was as legitimate as the ruins the explorers studied. In its 1881 statement, the PEF wrote about the parallels between modern Bedouins and the ancient Biblical people:

In manners, customs, and dress, the peasantry recall the incidental notices of the same population of pre-Christian times….The nomadic life of the early patriarchs is in the same way illustrated by the manners of the Bedawin of the deserts, and, as above stated, the settled and pastoral districts retain the same relative position as in earlier times.¹²¹

In their eyes, an uninterrupted lineage connected the current inhabitants to biblical people; the people and their customs had changed little over the many centuries since the events of the Bible.

¹¹⁹ Steever, "Our First Year in the Field," 67/128.


Conclusion

The British Palestine Exploration Fund was founded in 1865 to increase public understanding of the Bible through empirical investigation in Palestine. Its American counterpart was formed in 1870 and modeled closely after the British organization, asserting the same goals and motivations for research. For both organizations, exploration in the “Holy Land” was a project that reinforced national and religious identity, an assertion of national power and prestige through scientific study. Despite the many similarities between the PES and the PEF, each organization held a different significance for its nation’s identity and reputation. The Fund became useful to Great Britain for imperial purposes, although the PEF did not conceptualize itself as an imperial organization. Its decision to work with the American Society (seen as a non-threatening partner) on the survey of Palestine in the 1870s only highlights the imperial undertones of the British Fund. For the PES, national reputation was at stake; Americans like Edward Robinson had been pioneers in the field of Biblical Geography, and the American Society felt responsible for upholding this legacy. Emphasizing this American “tradition” was especially important in the 1870s when the United States was still recovering from the Civil War; the PES could cultivate much-needed national unity by looking back on American achievements and tapping into a common religious culture.

For both Great Britain and the United States, national identity was tied to Protestant religious beliefs. These beliefs were the main impetus behind the two organizations’ efforts in Palestine. Theologically, the PEF and PES were nearly the same: neither claimed to belong to a particular denomination, but most committee members and the organizations’ supporters were from Protestant backgrounds. Moreover, the way these organizations viewed the Bible indicates that they were Protestant in outlook. The Bible served as an inspiration for their work and they
used the Bible to verify and interpret their discoveries; most significantly, the Bible operated as a
guide to “read” the landscape of Palestine. The land itself was sacred, as such, it was as
spiritually significant as the Bible itself. Studying the land of Palestine was an exercise in faith
that would lead to spiritual and scientific discoveries. Analyzing the landscape for physical proof
of the Bible’s stories was crucial at a time when Christianity was being challenged by new
scientific discoveries. The PEF and PES were not seeking to challenge empirical knowledge but
rather, to use scientific inquiry to augment their faith.

Although the PES and PEF saw Palestine as their spiritual homeland, the region was
already claimed and populated. Each organization’s relationship with the Ottoman rulers of
Palestine was unique, based on their respective nation’s political relationship with the Ottoman
Empire. Great Britain was politically invested in the Ottoman state, using it as a buffer against
Russian expansion. The PEF had to work without jeopardizing their country’s official
relationship with the Ottomans, which may explain the PEF’s relative silence on its interactions
with Ottoman officials. The Americans on the other hand were less reticent since the United
States had no official relationship with the Ottomans. In fact, the PES explorers were grateful for
their help. However, the PES constantly grumbled about the people in Palestine, viewing them
with suspicion and disdain. Despite their low opinion of the people, the PES (as well as the PEF),
construed the inhabitants as “living history” of the Biblical past.

While the British Palestine Exploration Fund still exists as an organization, the American
Palestine Exploration Society lasted less than fifteen years, disbanding in 1884.122 The reasons
for the PES’s demise remain contested, with a wide range of problems cited as the causes for its
decline: infighting, lack of funds, inadequate survey equipment, disorganization, incompetence,

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122King, American Archaeology in the Mideast, 9. 1884 is only an approximate date; some primary sources
indicate that the group fell apart earlier.
and an overemphasis on religion.\textsuperscript{123} Felicity Cobbing maintains that the organization's failure resulted from "problems with finances and security in this very wild territory [eastern Palestine] [that] led to the final abandonment of any work in the field."\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, the map produced by the American expedition proved unusable for the PEF's purposes despite the Americans' detailed notes on topography and ruins. Cobbing writes, "when the map arrived in Britain, its shortcomings, which had been suspected for some time by the PEF, gradually came into the open."\textsuperscript{125} At a meeting of the PEF in November 1880, James Glaisher, chairman of the executive committee, concluded that the American Society's maps were only good for reconnaissance purposes:

You are well aware that the Americans had undertaken to make that survey [of east Palestine], but when I point out to you that the maps that they had sent to us, of which here are several, and when I tell you that an endeavour to connect the points that were common, revealed discrepancies so large in amount that is was not possible by any amount of coaxing to connect the one [map] with the other.\textsuperscript{126}

These dismal results of the Americans' work left the survey of eastern Palestine to the PEF; an expedition was able to survey parts of eastern Palestine in 1881, but was unable to finish the project since the Ottoman government stopped the survey and never granted the PEF a firman,\textsuperscript{127} possibly due to strained relations between the Ottoman and British government after the Bulgarian massacre in 1876. Additionally, Great Britain's more aggressive involvement in the Middle East, particularly its occupation of Egypt in 1882,\textsuperscript{128} directly threatened the Ottomans'

\textsuperscript{123} King, \textit{American Archaeology in the Mideast}, 9.


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid. 14.


Middle East territories, which may explain why the Ottomans were unwilling to grant the PEF a firman. The fact that the Ottoman government refused to allow the survey of east Palestine to continue strongly suggests that the Ottomans saw the PEF as an imperial tool, despite the PEF’s self-perception. In the end, the curtailed eastern survey was merely turned into a book that recounted the expedition’s discoveries\(^{129}\), and the PEF’s survey of western Palestine was published without the American map.\(^{130}\)

Silberman suggests in *Digging for God and Country*, that in addition to the PES’s shortage of money, results, and experience, the lack of significant support from the American government may have also played a role in the organization’s demise. “[S]ince the United States government had not yet developed any important commercial or strategic interests in the region, these was little hope of ever gaining any official support.”\(^{131}\) Silberman’s explanation implies a connection between imperial concerns and scientific discovery. According to this view, scholarly research benefitted from imperialism; individuals or organizations like the PEF could count on official support if their work dovetailed with imperial goals. Silberman’s assessment may not completely explain the American Society’s failure, or the British Fund’s survival, but it helps explains the role political interests play in scholarly research.

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\(^{129}\) Captain Claude R. Condor of the Royal Engineers led the PEF’s western survey and eastern survey. His account of the eastern survey, *Heth and Moab*, was published by the PEF in 1884. See tables section, “Heth and Moab” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement No. I, January 1884* (London: Office of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1884): 15/38.

\(^{130}\) The PEF’s map of western Palestine was first published in 1881.

\(^{131}\) Silberman, *Digging for God and Country*, 119.
The PEF focused more on archaeological work during the 1880s and 1890s. A small portion of west Palestine that the Fund had not surveyed in the 1870s, the Negev, was mapped many years later in 1914. This map and the rest of those created by the PEF explorers during the 1870s were put to use by the British military during World War One. The military application of the PEF’s work confirms that it was a tool of British imperialism, nevertheless, the organization’s imperial associations did not define it. Its members had genuine interest in studying Palestine and advancing Biblical knowledge and Christian faith.

As for the PES, though it did not last long and seemed to have made little impact with its work, the society facilitated the creation of another American organization dedicated to research in the Middle East, the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). Warren Moulton’s history of the PES says, “it is interesting to discover that those who had been its active supporters led the way in founding the later American Schools of Oriental Research. No doubt it would be true to say that the more recent organizations are a continuation of the earlier movement.” And Cobbing commends the Americans’ thoroughness in describing the region’s ruins, resources, and topography, “[i]t might even be fair to say that if the American Society had completed its work before the Palestine Exploration Fund had begun surveying the country itself, it could have been regarded very differently---as a pioneering effort.” Founders of the PES saw themselves as continuing a great American tradition of pioneering research and exploration in the Holy Land. While the PES failed to meet these grand expectations, the society sought to rally national

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132 Known to Bible scholars as the Wilderness of Zin, the area was strategically important since it stood between central Palestine and Sinai. Silberman, *Digging for God and Country*, 190.

133 Ibid. 194.


feeling around a shared religious identity at a time when the United States needed to rebuild unity. Considering the localized support the organization received, the PES was not entirely successful in this objective either.

Whatever the legacy of the Palestine Exploration Fund and American Palestine Exploration Society may be, the formation of these societies and their motivations highlight major developments in the United States and Great Britain in the late nineteenth century: political tensions in Europe and the escalation of European imperial activities in the Middle East; the interconnectedness of imperialism and scientific study; and the shift in how religious faith was conceptualized. The outlook and self-perception the two societies possessed draw attention to the cultural and political insecurities held by British and Americans. For Great Britain, the PEF underscored the urgency to gain an advantage against imperial rivals. And for both nations, exploration in Palestine dramatized the struggle to redefine Christian faith in light of new scientific knowledge.

"HETH AND MOAB."

This book, by Captain Claude R. Conder, R.E., is a popular account of the recent expedition to survey Eastern Palestine, interrupted and stopped by peremptory orders from Constantinople, as the readers of the *Quarterly Statement* already know. The work has now been out for two months, having been published in October, and the first edition is already nearly exhausted. It treats, in twelve chapters, of Kadesh on Orontes, the Land of the Hittites, the Phoenicians, the Land of Sihon, the Land of Ammon, Mount Gilead, Rude Stone Monuments, Syrian Dolmens, Syrian Superstitions, the Belka Arabs, Arab Folk-Lore, and the Future of Syria. There are also appendices. The following extracts are offered as some kind of guide to the contents of the volume.
Table 2: Full list of Society members in 1873, Palestine Exploration Society, The Society was organized a little more than two years ago, to co-operate, in generous rivalry, with the British "Palestine Exploration fund" in a thorough scientific survey of the Holy Land ... [List] of Members of the Society. [New York 1873]. Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, (New York, 1873).

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Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund. *Our Work in Palestine, Being An Account of*


(5) Letters from Archives of the American Geographical Society (AGS) (this is a series of letters transcribed by an archivist, Jovanka Ristic at the American Geographical Society)


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