



## Haj Amin and the Buraq Revolt

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*During the winter of 1920-21, a major topic of discussion among the elders of the prominent Husayni family was who would succeed the ailing Mufti Kamil Husayni: the mufti's brother 26-year-old Amin, or his son, Taher III. During Ottoman times, the empire's Grand Mufti would have chosen the heir, most certainly from the lineaged Husayni family. But under British rule, the matter was put to a vote by selected ulama in March 1921.*

*The Husayni family was shocked when Amin only placed fourth in the poll. Now Amin's appointment, once the subject of some internal disagreement, had become a matter of family prestige. The Husaynis rallied to solicit hundreds of petitions from all over the country in support of the young Amin; the British authorities were subsequently obliged*

<sup>1</sup> Taken with permission from *The Aristocracy of the Land: The Husayni Family* (Jerusalem: Mossad Byalik, 2003). For notes and references, please see Chapter Nine of the original text.



*to overturn the vote and name Amin over the elected candidate. To solidify his position, Amin closely engaged British authorities, earning him the title of "opportunist" from both Palestinian and Jewish critics.*

*With the creation of the Higher Muslim Council at Palestinian behest, Amin rose in standing at its head. He now had significant financial resources at hand with which to reward the constituencies around the country where his power resided. Slowly, Amin's generation of Husaynis continued to "nationalize" the family, and their objection to Zionism was unequivocal. But amid the great verbiage remaining from that period, an uncharacteristic statement by Amin stands out - that if it were not for the Balfour Declaration, he would have consented to Jewish immigration and settlement. These comments indicate that at that time this generation of Husaynis remained uncertain about their attitude to Zionism; that uncertainty was to vanish in the thirties.*

Even before the first spark ignited the Arab revolt throughout Palestine, Jerusalem experienced the second wave of violence in the Arab-Jewish conflict. The ancient city has experienced all kinds of religious strife - diverse Christian sects, Muslims and Jews, have all on occasion grabbed one another by the throat for some reason connected with their religions and rites. In the late Ottoman period the Muslims ruled all aspects of life in the city, and all religious disputes - including those concerning the status of the "Western Wall" (as named by the Jews) and "Waqf Abu Madiyan" (its Muslim name) - were resolved by the Ottoman government in favour of the Muslims.

The wall in question was the western outer wall of the Herodian temple, which had been built on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon. Since the Middle Ages it had been a place of prayer and lamentation (hence its popular name, the Wailing Wall) for the fallen glory

of ancient Israel. But the wall is also the western wall of the Haram al-Sharif, and is called by Muslims "al-Buraq", after Prophet Muhammed's famous horse. It abutted on what was known as the neighbourhood of the Magharibah (North Africans), and throughout the Ottoman period, until the Great War, it was part of a religious property named after one Abu Madiyan. All through those years Jews had to obtain permission from the Muslim authorities to visit the site, which they were not allowed to treat as a place of pilgrimage and regular worship.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the Jews appealed to the Ottoman authorities, but these generally ruled for the Muslims. The British authorities eased conditions for the Jewish worshippers to some degree, while agreeing with both sides to preserve the status quo with regard to all the holy places. After World War I, however, the Jewish community was the largest in Jerusalem and the new government tended to be pro-Zionist, so it was natural that the status of the Jewish holy places would be affected. Muslim anger about these changes led to the bloody events of 1929, and would focus on the disputed religious site.

The British takeover of Jerusalem made the Jews feel more confident, and they broke some of the conditions to which they had been subjected under the Ottomans. The Mandatory government enabled the Zionists to increase their presence on the site by small increments. Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann was actively engaged in the matter and immediately after Allenby's conquest of Jerusalem proposed to Governor Ronald Storrs to purchase the Wall. The Magharibah community, which had lived in the area ever since coming to Jerusalem as pilgrims, were interested in Weizmann's offer of some

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This edition of *Jerusalem Quarterly File* includes two slightly differing historical accounts of Jewish worship at the Western/al-Buraq Wall. Please see "Bab al-Magharibah: Joha's Nail in the Haram al-Sharif."

70,000 Palestinian pounds if they evacuated the site, but the Palestinian leaders prevented the deal.

While Kamil al-Husayni was Mufti, the Muslim authorities reacted mildly to the Jewish breaches of the status quo at the Wall, but once the High Muslim Council was launched, and the Jews' confidence grew, the clashes at the site intensified. Increasingly the Jews brought chairs and benches into the area, and the Palestinians connected this behaviour to statements made by Jewish and Zionist figures about the need to build the "Third Temple." Haj Amin, testifying before the government commission that investigated the events of 1929, referred to those statements.

After the establishment of the High Muslim Council, Amin kept calling the government's attention to the fact that the Jews were bringing more objects and religious appurtenances into the area in front of the Wall. The Council also presented the government with retouched photographs showing the Jewish Temple standing on the Haram al-Sharif, pictures that were being sent out to potential Zionist donors overseas. Throughout the twenties, the Palestinian Executive and the High Muslim Council sent delegates and appeals to all parts of the Muslim world, asking for assistance against the threat of a Jewish takeover of the Haram al-Sharif.

One of the Mufti's most effective ways of enhancing local and regional interest in Jerusalem was by restoring the shrines of the Haram al-Sharif. They had already been in need of such work in Ottoman times, but now the main impetus for the enterprise was political. In 1923-1924, Haj Amin managed to raise substantial contributions from all over the Muslim world, and started the renovation, whose climax was the gold-plating of the Dome of the Rock. The historian Zvi al-Peleg has suggested that

Amin also hoped that this achievement would eclipse the mayor of Jerusalem.

The atmosphere was growing increasingly tense. Already in 1925 there was a flare-up near the Western Wall, following which the Jewish Agency demanded that the British government compel the Muslim religious authorities to sell the Wall. The following year the Agency proposed purchasing fifty metres of the Haram al-Sharif, including the Wall, and began to negotiate the deal with the government, but it fell through. At the end of 1928, Weizmann wished to offer 61,000 Palestinian pounds for the property, but accepted the advice of the High Commissioner, John Chancellor, to wait for a more opportune moment. The Husayni family could take pride in Amin, who avidly guarded the Haram; it was as if the Ottoman Sultan at the end of the eighteenth century had foreseen the future when he entrusted the guardianship of the holy places in Jerusalem to Abd al-Latif al-Husayni and his progeny.

Early on 23 September 1928, the eve of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the janitor of the Sephardi congregation came to Haj Amin's office to report that he had just seen the janitor of the Ashkenazi congregation bringing into the area in front of the Western Wall an arch, from which he suspended a large curtain, as well as pallets and oil lamps. The curtain was an unusually large screen, and provoked the Mufti's anger when he saw it for himself. It was a provocation not only against the Muslims, but also against the Sephardi janitor, who would not receive the traditional fee for the job. The Muslim leadership immediately complained to Edward Keith Roach, deputy governor of the Jerusalem district, who ordered the janitor to remove the architectural addition from the Wall's forecourt. But the following day the screen was still standing - the orthodox Jews would not do any work on the holy day, nor would they allow anyone else to do it for



them. The installation of this screen separating men and women on the eve of the Day of Atonement in 1928 set off the first clash. In response, the High Muslim Council created a committee, "For the Defense of al-Buraq."

How did this incident set off a violent clash, the bloodiest since the start of the British Mandate, between the two national movements? Palestinian historians would praise the Mufti for turning a marginal event into a national one, thus establishing his leadership, while Israeli historians have accused the Mufti of exploiting a trivial discord to incite Muslims to murder Jews. However, the Mufti was not the first to drag the opponents into a battlefield. It was the World Zionist Federation which, shaken by the incident, charged the British police with aggression against the Jewish worshippers who refused to dismantle the arch and the screen they had set up. Four days later a big Jewish demonstration took place in Jerusalem, in which the more extreme elements threatened to seize the policeman who had dismantled the screen and tear him limb from limb. Then a general strike was declared. The Hebrew papers poured fire and brimstone on the gentiles - specifically the Muslims - and the national poet H. N. Bialik bemoaned the desolate Western Wall. Subsequently Harry Lock of the government Secretariat stated that "Jewish public opinion has turned what was essentially a religious matter into a political-racial one."

Among historians, the Palestinian Philip Mattar, and following him the Israeli Zvi al-Peleg, have questioned the thesis upheld by a good many Palestinian scholars and adopted by the Israeli Yehoshua Porath, namely, that the Mufti had consciously turned a minor incident into a violent clash. Mattar states that Amin said nothing for six days after the incident at the Wall, and that even his publication *al-Jamaa al-Arabiya* did not print

any hateful or inciting material. Why? Because the Mufti did not wish to do anything that might divert the Mandatory government from its growing sympathy with the Palestinian position. But when a week passed and the government did nothing, he decided to act.

Throughout that week the Jewish reactions were fierce and the atmosphere grew heated. Bialik, the Hebrew newspapers and Zionists spokesmen overseas, all communicated a clear message, that the Western Wall was in danger, and needed to be protected from those who threatened it. The Hebrew daily *Doar Hayom* described those who threatened it as "hooligans, like the Russian pogromists."

On 30 September the High Muslim Council rallied thousands of Muslims from Jerusalem and environs to the al-Aqsa Mosque, where three of Amin's loyalists, Shaykh Abd al-Ghani Kamla, Izzat Darwazah and Shaykh Abu al-Saud, made speeches denouncing the Jewish aspiration to take over the Western Wall.

Now the Jewish National Executive realized the danger and tried to defuse the situation. On 10 October it published an open letter stating categorically that there was no Jewish intention to seize the Temple Mount. But at the same time various Jewish leaders, led by Chaim Weizmann, continued to address the Jewish public, at home and abroad, about the need to resist Muslim intentions. Such statements could not be kept hidden from the public in Palestine.

All through September 1928 Amin resisted the idea of acting in opposition to the laws of the Mandatory government. When he was approached that month by the extremist Syrian Shakib Wahab, with a proposal to organize guerrilla groups to fight the government, he rejected it outright. A month later, however, he decided to take stronger measures. His role as head of the Council and

guardian of the Muslim religious properties, his ambition to lead the Palestinian people, the opposition's carping about his feeble reactions, and the inflammatory Zionist propaganda, all these impelled him to take action. He launched the campaign of "al-Buraq", which is still considered the finest passage in his career and one of the few to become part of the Palestinian ethos. As he saw it, he was faced with a triple alliance - the British government, the local Jewish leadership and the Jews of the United States - against which he hoped to rally the Muslim and Arab world. On 1 November he convened and conducted a conference of Arab solidarity with Palestine, with 700 delegates from several Arab countries. The conference appointed a "committee for the defence of the holy Muslim places in Jerusalem," and sent a delegation to the Chief Government Secretary Sir Harry Charles Lock, who was deputizing for High Commissioner Chancellor, then on home leave. The delegation demanded, inter alia, the dismissal of the pro-Zionist Jewish prosecutor Norman Bentwich, whose position enabled him to influence decisions concerning the Western Wall.

Amin also wrote Lock a personal letter arguing that the reactions of the Jews proved that not only did they seek to deprive the Muslims of the religious property of Abu Madiyan, they were plotting to take over the entire Haram al-Sharif. Early in October Amin's paper *al-Jamaa al-Arabiya* published articles about the Muslim right to the Abu Madiyan religious property. Though in October and November 1928 the Jewish leadership in Palestine tried to respond moderately and defuse the tension, its overseas representatives - as usual - took a more radical stand and suggested that the British government compel the sale of the Western Wall to the Jews.

In the winter of 1928 the British authorities in

Palestine decided to intervene, and as a first step published a White Paper. Considering the mounting confrontation as part of the conflict about the future of the country as a whole, the White Paper linked the issue of the Wall with that of the legislative assembly. The Colonial Office backed the Mufti's positions both on the legislative assembly (he held that its membership should reflect the demographic ratio in the land), and on the ownership of the Wall. On the ground, however, the Jewish presence at the Western Wall continued to increase, and the practical talks about creating a parliament in Palestine were not renewed.

Amin felt frustrated by the government's attitude and launched a "holy war" - in his words - for the Haram. At first the war was vocal - he stationed a *muazin* above the wall, who five times a day called on the Muslims to come and defend the wall, disturbing the Jewish prayers below. To the same end the Muslims also revived the loud *zikr* rites, commonly practiced by Sufi sects. Held near the little garden close to the Wall, they filled the air with a deafening noise. "We promised our Mughrabi brothers, who are attached to the Sufi tradition, to reinstate these rites as in past times," the Mufti explained to the Shaw Commission, which was appointed to investigate the violent outbreaks. He also ordered an additional wing to be added to the Sharia court building, and the stonemasons' hammering and shouting made things harder still for the Jewish worshippers.

In the fifties, the Mufti would argue that the struggle had been directed against the British, too, but this does not seem to have been the case. Though many Palestinian historians have accepted this argument, others, such as Philip Mattar, have not. Indeed, during that time Amin was trying to cooperate with the British authorities and urge them to adopt a pro-Palestinian position. He was suspicious about the British government in London, but



inclined to trust many individuals among the Mandatory authorities.

The year 1928 passed without an outbreak, but the war of words intensified and tension kept mounting. In April 1929 the High Commissioner John Chancellor suggested to the Mufti to sell the religious property and enable to Jews to build a courtyard in front of the Western Wall. The Mufti responded mildly, saying he could understand that the Jews' needed to pray, but such a concession would endanger Muslim standing throughout the Haram al-Sharif. Palestinian historiography, including recent work that draws on newly revealed material, suggests that the Mufti's concern was not baseless, and that there really was a Jewish plan to seize the entire Haram. But this does not correspond to the pragmatic Zionism of the time, which would have been satisfied with the Western Wall and would have regarded its possession as a major step forward for Zionism.

It should be noted that the 1929 outbreak was caused not only by the events in Jerusalem, but by larger circumstances. Some 90,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine between 1921 and 1929, and though the influx ebbed in the years 1926-1928, the presence of so many new immigrants in the labour market, and the efforts of the Zionist organizations to purchase land for them, made Zionism into a tangible factor in the lives of many ordinary Palestinians. If in 1920 Jews bought a total of 262 acres, in 1925 they bought 44,000 acres. During those "quiet years," which saw no violent clashes, the Jews purchased a third of all the land they would acquire throughout the British Mandate, though never at such a tremendous rate as in 1925. By the end of 1928 there were about 100 Jewish settlements in the country, the leading commercial concessions were in Jewish hands, and the percentage of Jews in trade and industry kept growing. At the same time, rural Palestine

was experiencing an economic decline, giving rise to internal migration to the growing cities, a process that would accelerate in the thirties. Shanties began to surround the growing towns and cities, providing cheap labour for the urban population, both Jewish and Arab, and their misery could be used to political objectives. Long working hours in inhuman conditions intensified the bitterness and produced pockets of wretchedness that in 1929, as at any historical crossroads, could explode into violent action. It was easy to persuade the populace that their misery was caused by Zionism, since the internal migration, the loss of land and employment, were connected to the growth of the Jewish community. This volatile situation was made worse by the activities of the Zionist rightwing movement, Beitar, which launched a series of provocations that made the outbreak of violence unavoidable.

Yet the first half of 1929 passed relatively peacefully. Despite the tension in the city, Amin had the leisure to cooperate with an urban project that had been close to his heart for some time - the construction of a hotel to accommodate the potentates of the Arab and Muslim world. Appropriately, he named it the Palace Hotel. This not only advanced the development of Jerusalem, it also answered the demands of Palestinian tourist interests, who watched anxiously as Jews became the principal hoteliers in the city. To pay for the construction of the new hotel, Amin used the funds of the Muslim religious properties. The site chosen was in the heart of the Mamilla neighbourhood, provoking a protest which is only too familiar in our time - Muslim religious scholars protested that it would be built on top of Muslim graves, as though there can be in Jerusalem a site that does not contain tombs.

At long last the objections were dropped and the building rose. Designed by an imaginative

and experienced Turkish architect, it blended Arab and Western elements in an elegant way. The contractor, oddly enough, was a Jew - the engineer Baruch Katinka, who with Tuviah Dunya, owned a construction company that operated in Haifa and Jerusalem during the twenties.

It had come about like this: early in 1927, Katinka heard from a Palestinian acquaintance that the High Muslim Council had published a tender for the construction of a hotel, which the acquaintance thought would be a suitable project for Katinka and Dunya. Moreover, he suggested that they add his name - Oud - to the bid, so that it could appear as a Jewish-Arab enterprise. To their surprise, the contractors won the tender, and as Katinka recalled, they continued to be surprised at their meeting with Haj Amin and Hilmi Pasha: "They received us courteously, and got down directly to drafting the contract." Other preconceived ideas were dispelled in the course of the negotiations. Amin demanded that the contractors meet the stiff timetable he had set for the project.

An elaborate Arabic inscription was painstakingly carved and placed high on the hotel's facade. The entire building was designed in arabesque style, expressing the taste of the Turkish architect, Nihaz Bey. Amin demanded that the contractors give priority to Arab workers, which they did. As often happens in Jerusalem, on the second day of the project Katinka came across ancient burials, but the worried Mufti asked him to keep it secret, fearing that the work would be stopped. He knew only too well that Ragheb al-Nashashibi would not hesitate to turn the "desecration" to his political ends. "And so I became the Mufti's confidant," wrote Katinka in his memoirs. He found Amin "a fairly easy person, intelligent, sharp and polite." This was probably the last favourable comment made by a Zionist about Haj Amin.

Amin came to the site every day to observe the progress, and often expressed his satisfaction with the work of the Jewish contractors. He was so pleased with them, that he hired them to build his new house in Shaykh Jarrah. "It was 1929," Katinka recalled, "and the tension between Jews and Arabs was mounting day by day. But my association with the Mufti had reached the stage of warm personal conversations." Amin revealed to Katinka that his financial situation did not allow him to finish his house - "The foundations have been laid, but the rest is stuck." After studying the plans, Katinka offered to build the house cheaply and complete it in two years.

Amin's house rose next to the hotel, both built by the Jewish contractors. This was not a trivial matter - Dunya was Chaim Weizmann's brother-in-law and friend, and Amin knew it. Dunya recalled that Amin tried to send political messages through him, but he politely declined. When the pressure grew, Dunya told Amin the following story: a Jew from a small town in Central Europe migrated to America, and in that land of unlimited opportunities he set up a stall for selling pancakes. Eventually he became the owner of a chain of pancake stalls. One day a man arrived from his native town and asked him for a loan. The successful immigrant pointed to the nearby bank and explained that he had an agreement with the bankers - he would sell pancakes, and they would extend loans. His relations with Chaim Weizmann, Dunya said, were much the same - he built houses and Weizmann dealt in politics.

One message that Amin did communicate to Dunya (though not to Weizmann) was that his opposition to the partition of the country was not personal but political, because it would not be accepted by the majority of the Palestinians. "When I stand before the Arab people and announce that I have come to an agreement with the Jews, based on



*Al-Nabi Musa was an important Muslim festival where worshippers processed from Jerusalem to Moses' traditional burial site near Jericho. Source: Before the Diaspora*

concessions I made them, the entire Arab people would ostracise me and denounce me as a traitor who sold his homeland."

At the hotel opening ceremony Amin publicly praised Katinka and Dunya, and thereafter always invited them to the Nabi Musa celebrations. He also sent them platters with warm dishes at the end of Passover, so they could enjoy fresh risen bread as soon as possible. Dunya and Katinka "repaid" him by using the hotel to hide two arms caches for the Hagana.

This kind of local and personal cooperation did not extend to the political arena. Tensions rose from day to day, leading to the eruption of 1929. (The Palace Hotel, incidentally, lasted for five years, then closed when the

new King David Hotel eclipsed it as Jerusalem's most palatial hostelry.)

The Mufti continued to cooperate with the British authorities through the spring and summer of 1929, in the hope of stopping the escalation, and was bitterly disappointed when it turned out to have been in vain. In the summer of 1929, a new government came to power in London - the first Labour government - led by the vacillating Ramsay MacDonald, and with a Colonial Secretary, Sidney Webb, who had yet to acquaint himself with the issues. Between them they suspended all British action and initiative in Palestine, and in the absence of clear directives, the Mandatory government dealt with the symptoms. The Mufti was pressured to stop the Sufi performances near the



*Jerusalem stores near Jaffa Gate closed in protest during the 1929 al-Buraq revolt. Source: Before the Diaspora*

Western Wall, and when he gave in, he was accused by his opponents, notably the Nashashibis, of surrendering to the British. Seeking to counteract these charges, he started a restoration of the wall near the section where the Jews prayed. Young Beitar men stopped the work, and were praised by the chief rabbi, Rabbi Kook. However, the leaders of the 16<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress in Zurich were less impressed, and asked Vladimir Jabotinsky to moderate his followers' aggressive behaviour. Still, it only grew worse. Two thousand young Beitar men, led by Yosef Klausner, circled the city walls, proclaiming that they were "the Western Wall Defence Committee."

In the summer of 1929, Amin began to feel the ground rumbling beneath his feet. He was

less occupied with the Western Wall, but the young men and many other Palestinians anxiously followed the developments there, and waited for the Mufti and other leaders to take firm action. Just before the outbreak, Amin met again with High Commissioner John Chancellor, who expressed the hope that the Mufti was satisfied with the government's position. The Mufti responded that he was loyal to the government, but added that if the Muslim community did not receive any substantive proposals, he could not vouch for continuing law and order. At this point Chancellor, who had hitherto been pleasant, frowned and said sharply, "You need not worry about law and order, these matters are my responsibility." This arrogance was one of the reasons the British were taken by surprise



in the summer when, for the first time since they occupied the country in 1917, violence erupted on a large scale.

In August 1929, the seeds of disaffection sown the previous winter sprouted a venomous crop. On a Thursday, in the middle of the month, a group of young Beitar men gathered in front of Government House and began to march towards the Western Wall. There, facing the western wall of the Haram al-Sharif, they raised the Zionist flag, sang "Hatikvah", and shouted, "The Wall is ours!" Rumours about the Zionist demonstration in the Mughrabi neighbourhood spread quickly, inflated with a claim that Muslims had been beaten up. Tension grew higher. The following day, during Friday prayers, it reached an intolerable point. Muslims held an anti-Jewish demonstration, and a Jewish boy who had kicked a ball into his neighbours' tomato patch was murdered. The next day, a Muslim boy was stabbed. The funeral of the Jewish boy was big and forceful. It was organized by the Jewish Agency, which the Arabs of Jerusalem regarded as a particularly intimidating, rich and powerful body. The following week Beitar held another demonstration, which was met with a mass counter-demonstration by villagers from the vicinity of Jerusalem, to whom Amin addressed a fiery speech. Unable to contain their rage, the crowd broke into the area in front of the Western Wall. In the following few hours they also burst into most streets in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

That Thursday the Mufti consulted with his associates about the developments. He had not forgotten his persecution by the British in 1920, and tried to obtain a visa to go to Syria, but the local consul refused to give him one. In any event, he did not have to confront the British authorities. Testifying before the commission of inquiry that would later investigate the events of 1929, Amin stated that he had not asked for a visa to flee the

scene, but for his regular summer vacation - he had been accustomed to go to Turkey every August, but since he suffered from seasickness, he decided on an overland holiday.

That Thursday Jamal al-Husayni called on Harry Lock, the government secretary, who was trying to arrange a Jewish-Arab meeting to cool the atmosphere. But the two sides could not agree, and decided to hold another meeting the following Monday. By then, however, scores of Jews and Arabs had paid with their lives for the aborted reconciliation.

That Friday a wave of violent unrest swept over the country that lasted a whole week. That day, 23 August, Amin was urgently summoned from home by Alan Saunders, the acting commander of the Jerusalem police and deputy commander of the Mandatory police. Thousands of Muslims, armed with clubs and knives and a few rifles, had gathered on the Haram al-Sharif, claiming that the Mufti had told them to wreak vengeance on the Jews. In reality, the Mufti was not responsible for this rumour. When he reached the plaza he heard the cry, "Sayf al-din, al-Haj Amin!" He and Said al-Khatib, the imam who conducted the Friday worship, agreed that the sermon that day would be a moderate one, to calm the hotheads.

On Saturday Amin and Musa Kazem al-Husayni were summoned to the house of the High Commissioner, who demanded that the Mufti do more to defuse the tension. Amin replied that there would be no point in his issuing such a call, unless the Jewish leaders did the same. "It's Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath," Keith-Roach replied. "They can't be reached by telephone." That day Amin summoned the headmen of the surrounding villages and asked them to calm their people. "The government is looking after the interests of the Arabs," he assured them. But neither there nor on the Haram, nor later at the Nablus Gate, was the Mufti able to stem the

irate human tide. Jewish attacks on Sur Baher and an attack on the Nashashibi house at Bab al-Sahra, ignited an all-out Arab assault. A baseless rumour that an Arab had been lynched in the orthodox Jewish neighbourhood of Meah Shearim made it into the first arena. Thus the first casualties were non-Zionist Jews of that neighbourhood, and later of Yemin Moshe, who had always been on good terms with their Arab neighbours. The Mufti's call, "Arm yourselves with compassion, wisdom and tolerance, because Allah is always with the tolerant!" fell on deaf ears. Together with his friend George Antonius, he addressed the crowd:

"Calm yourselves, go home and leave me to do all I can. The government is not against you, nor the police. It is the duty of the government to maintain order. You know my feelings and views - I have always advised you to trust your leaders."

But his voice was submerged by the roar of the crowd. Antonius saw that the Mufti's presence stirred the people rather than calmed them, and at his urging Amin went home.

Amin held talks with the leaders of Nablus and Hebron, but failed to pacify them, especially where the Hebronites were concerned, since his standing in that town was shaky and they would not listen to him. There the Nashashibis were better entrenched, Israeli historiography notwithstanding. They incited the mob against the Jewish community, with the result that 64 Hebronite Jews were massacred. The same thing happened in Safad, where 26 Jews were murdered. The opposite camp, Zionist and British, was no less ruthless - in Jaffa a Jewish mob murdered seven Arabs, and all in all 133 Jews and 116 Muslims perished during that bloody week.

Most of the Arabs were shot by British policemen and soldiers. Already on 24 August the government had decided to arm

500 Jews, and these contributed to the deadly score. Three days after this decision a furious mob surrounded Amin's house, demanding weapons, and Amin lost his head for the first time. He telephoned Harry Lock and asked him to receive a delegation led by Musa Kazem; Amin sent Musa Kazem only when the situation was physically dangerous. At the urging of the delegation, the authorities agreed to disarm forty Jewish policemen, as a countermeasure to the arming of 500 Jewish civilians.

As soon as the violence subsided, the Mandatory government took harsh measures, blaming the Mufti and the Palestinians for what had occurred. The High Commissioner, John Chancellor, had returned from home leave the day before the massacre in Safad. It was 1 September 1929. He published an announcement placing all the blame on the leaders of the Muslim community. Later the commission of inquiry would exonerate the Mufti and place the blame on both sides, but by then a gulf had opened between the Palestinians and the British, and thereafter the Arab population judged Amin by his anti-British as much as by his anti-Zionist position.

Already in November 1929 there were indications that the violent eruptions were due to a mistaken British policy, rather than to inherent Muslim aggression. The High Commissioner thought so, and so did the government in London. On 19 November the Colonial Secretary issued a statement promising the Palestinians that the Haram al-Sharif would be restored to its former situation. But this was no longer sufficient, and the Palestinians, or at any rate their political elite, expected a more substantive change in the British policy concerning the conflict.

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