Book of the Month I

The Foundations of Zionism

By Sabri Jiryis

Translated from Arabic by Fida Jiryis

Ebb Books, October 2025, 614 pages, US$27.99

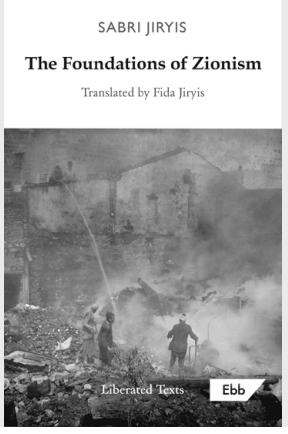


Translated into English for the first time since its original publication by the PLO's Palestine Research Center, this book extensively details the origins of Zionism and its development as an ideology and political project that has wreaked havoc in the Middle East and beyond over the last century.

The Foundations of Zionism chronicles the development from Zionism's origins up to the establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine in 1923, refuting many of the movement's own foundational myths – from its early relationship with the Palestinians to its exclusively religious character. Sabri Jiryis delves into Zionism's successive congresses and factional struggles, its settlers' early failures in Palestine and the formation of armed militias, and its temporary alliances with the Ottoman Empire before the movement eventually secured support from Western colonial powers, especially Britain. In a newly written conclusion, Jiryis reconsiders the Zionist project 100 years on from the Balfour Declaration and amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The importance of translating this book lies in the necessity of understanding the Zionist movement – especially its expansionist and exclusionary aspects – and the roots of the Arab-Palestinian conflict, particularly at this critical juncture for the Palestinian cause. Few Palestinian and Arab writers have addressed the history of the Zionist movement. The majority of sources are still by Jewish and foreign authors. This book presents a comprehensive Palestinian study by a leading scholar of Zionism in the region and refutes many of the erroneous assumptions put forward by Jewish and Western authors, without a reliable historical basis, to defend Zionism.

The book tells Zionism's inner story, beginning with its origins and spread, moving through its supporters and ideology at various stages, its organizations, parties, and institutions, and culminating in its efforts to control Palestine and the region, which reached their peak with the establishment of the State of Israel. To complete the picture, it was also essential to examine the international and Arab circumstances that enabled Zionism to achieve a significant part of its objectives.



Using Jewish and Zionist sources, mainly in Hebrew, the book traces the evolution of Zionism from a vague, limited religious idea to a political movement that arose in Eastern Europe in the mid-nineteenth century due to the specific circumstances of the Jews there. The author presents the movement's ideological and religious foundations and its development into a political expression that aimed to establish a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. He also documents the ideas and practices of the movement's key founders, including Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, Ber Borochov, Ahad Ha'am, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and others.

The book follows the development of the Zionist movement, drawing on documents, books, and diaries of its leaders and institutions, and its collaboration with the West after World War I, particularly with the victorious Allied powers, in order to realize its ambitions in Palestine. It focuses specifically on its close cooperation with the British government before and during the British Mandate, during which Britain provided numerous facilities that proved indispensable for the Zionist movement to achieve its goals.

The book also addresses a topic often overlooked in the history of this period: the resistance of the Palestinian Arabs themselves to these plans, from the outset, and their efforts to confront a course that they perceived as dangerous and that aimed to uproot them from their homeland.

About the author:

Sabri Jiryis was born in the village of Fassouta, in the upper Galilee, in 1938. After the Nakba*, he grew up under Israeli military rule and graduated as a lawyer from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in 1962. He joined the founding members of al-Ard, the first Palestinian political movement in Israel, and, in 1966, published his landmark book,* The Arabs in Israel*, in Hebrew. The book was translated into nine languages and became a seminal reference. In the 1970s, Jiryis left for Lebanon, joined the PLO within Fatah's advisory council, and became the director of the PLO Palestine Research Center and the editor in chief of its monthly journal,* Shu'un Filastiniyya *(Palestine Affairs). Jiryis published* A History of Zionism*, in Arabic, in two parts, the first in 1977 and the second in 1986. This is the first English translation, by his daughter, Fida, author of* Stranger in My Own Land *(Hurst, 2022).*

SCAN TO SHARE