



Satellite image of Gallipoli Penninsula, the Strait of Dardanelles, and the Sea of Marmara – NASA's World Wind, Wikimedia

In peace, sons bury their fathers.

In war, fathers bury their sons.

— Herodotus

Yvonne

In the long run we are all dead**— John Maynard Keynes**

I cuddled in the cradle of Giovanni's arms and listened to the whirring of the wind in the trees, watching the grey shifting clouds slip over the sun, reappearing and disappearing and reappearing in a froth of clouds. After a while, his fatigue swept over him and he drifted off to sleep. I threw the cashmere blanket over him and went to sleep.

I was awakened by his hand caressing my arm, "Your story about Sophie Scholl did me in."

"I'm sorry."

"Did we sleep long?"

"Maybe thirty minutes. We might get some rain. Do you want to go?"

"You've been away for so long," I said, snuggling close. "It's been heaven lying here with you. I don't want it to end."

"I feel the same. Let's risk the rain."

"Are you hungry? We have some potatoes left."

"I've never tasted a potato gratinée like that? What makes it so different?"

"Anchovies."

"I would've never guessed."

"*Pomme des terres aux anchois*—potatoes, sautéed onions, eggs beaten with heavy cream and topped with *gruyère* and baked in the oven. At the last minute, I put it under the broiler for a minute. The potatoes absorb the anchovies giving it that salty kick."

I prepared Giovanni a plate and he ate heartily as he always does when I cook. He's lost a lot of weight on tour. I'm going to fatten him up.

He finished the last of the 1947 Gaston Huet. "This is one of the finest white wines, I've had."

“You really splurged.”

“You’re worth every franc, my darling.”

“You couldn’t have chosen a better one. 1947 was one of the greatest years for Vouvray. Both Victor Huet and his son, Gaston had terrible luck during the wars.”

“How’s that?”

“The founder of the domaine, Victor Huet, had his lungs scorched in the First World War by poison gas. To improve his health, Huet moved to Vouvray in the 20’s where he had the good fortune to buy the first of his great *vignobles*. Le Haut-Lieu lies on Vouvray’s Première Cote, a grand cru domaine. The limestone-clay soil produces wine that blossoms early. Its glory comes from *le terroir*, the soil. Since he was a kid, his son Gaston worked with him to create a world class wine. When his father’s health failed in the 30’s, Gaston took over the domaine and made even greater wines.”



The Red Vineyard by Vincent van Gogh, Arles, France, 1888 – Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, public domain, Wikimedia

Giovanni raised his glass, “I’ll drink to that — *absolument stupéfiant*. I wonder if Herzl had succeeded at the turn of the century in setting up a state for the Jews, couldn’t the Holocaust have been avoided?”

“It would’ve depended upon assimilated and Reformed Jews making the decision to immigrate in great numbers to a Jewish state in Argentina or Palestine. In the 19th century, the Jews had become woven into the fabric of Germany financially and even culturally. They would’ve had to sell everything and give up the history they’d shared in Europe for centuries. In the middle of the 18th century, a cultural revolution had taken place among Prussian Jews called the Haskalah, derived from the Hebrew *le-haskil*. Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, the leader of the Haskalah movement, wrote essays in German and Hebrew, on themes from Plato, Spinoza, Locke, and Leibniz in which he argued that enlightenment was a process of applying reason to solve the problems of man.



Moses Mendelssohn – Portrait by Anton Graff, public domain, University of Leipzig, Wikipedia

“The Haskalah founded the Jewish Free School in Berlin, which became a force for opposing intolerance and prejudice against Judaism. Mendelssohn’s elegant prose caught on with Christians in Berlin who called him the ‘German Socrates.’ After a silk manufacturer hired Mendelssohn as a tutor, it opened the door to Berlin society and wealthy Christian patrons began hiring penniless Jewish scholars to work as household tutors. During the 1790’s, Henriette Herz, the daughter of the first Jewish physician in Berlin, and Rahel Levin, daughter of a jewel merchant, held salons in Berlin like the salons in Paris of Germaine de Staël, daughter of Necker, finance minister to King Louis XVI, and Madame Recamier, the most brilliant conversationalist of her day. Napoleon, enraged by de Staël’s and Recamier’s criticism, exiled the two intellectuals from Paris.

“In the Berlin salons of Herz and Levin, members of the ancient Junker nobility and prominent Jews had the chance to meet to discuss art, politics, and literature with merchants, professors, scientists, theologians, and writers. Haskalah occurred during a time of great creativity in German culture, the era of Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, leaders of the *Strum and Drang* movement in German literature.”

“*Strum and Drang?*”

“*Strum and Drang*, was a forerunner of romanticism — a rebellion against the rationalism of the Enlightenment. It romanticized emotional extremes, that is, we are most human when we act with unrestrained feelings. Influenced by William Shakespeare, Goethe at the age of 24, wrote a semi-autobiographical novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which overnight made him a literary sensation.”

“Isn’t *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a tragedy?”

“A deadly one, expressing the spirit of German Romanticism. Werther meets Charlotte in a little village and falls head over heels in love with her despite the fact that she is engaged to a much older man. Despite the pain he suffers, Werther becomes close friends with the couple, then after a few months of torture flees from Charlotte only to be drawn back by *amour impossible*. Eventually it dawns on young Werther that there’s only one solution — he must take his own life.”

“Werther must have inspired a number of suicides by unrequited lovers.”



Charlotte at Werther's Grave – Anonymous, circa 1790, Wikimedia

“Killing yourself has always appealed to tormented youths — narcissistic nihilism. It’s quite romantic — when love fails, kill yourself. When Goethe got older he abandoned his early romanticism in favor of a restrained classicism. You’d like Goethe’s poems. They’ve been an inspiration for romantic composers who revolutionized music with unpredictable leaps, sudden melodic shifts, rapidly evolving tempos, pulsing rhythms and syncopation, creating the emotions which are the essence of Romanticism.”

“You must be referring to the German and Viennese composers, Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig von Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, and Richard Wagner.”

“Yes, and other composers too, Felix Mendelssohn, Hector Berlioz, and Gustav Mahler. The latter half of the 18th century in Germany was a great period for music and philosophy at the same time that the Jewish enlightenment Haskalah was flourishing in Berlin. Moses Mendelssohn’s philosophy encouraged a young generation of Jews to study law, medicine, and science in the German universities and led to a gradual integration of Jews into society. But the Haskalah also produced a backlash against the Jewish salon elite. One lawyer published a diatribe *Against the Jews*, arousing the anti-Semitism of German nationalists. Despite the backlash against the Jewish enlightenment, the Haskalah brought about the creation of a secular Jewish intelligentsia which co-existed alongside the traditional Talmud scholars.”

“From what you’ve told me of philosopher, Heinrich von Treitschke condemning Jews for being disloyal to Germany, I’d think it would be impossible for Haskalah to stop anti-Semitism in Prussia.”

“One thinker came up with an alternative to Herzl’s Zionism. Walter Benjamin proposed that rather than creating a national state, Jews should embrace their Jewishness by being a creator *within* European culture. Influenced by German Romanticism and Marxism, Benjamin wrote salient critiques of Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, and Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil*. In Benjamin’s view the Jews were spiritual leaders who would create a higher civilization within Europe.”

“Did Benjamin’s ideas take hold?”

“It was a realistic idea primarily because it had already taken place. Marek Edelman, a Bundist socialist labor activist before the war who after the death of Mordechaj Anielewicz, became leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, said, ‘The Bundists didn’t wait for the Messiah, nor did they leave for Palestine. They believed that Poland was their country and they fought for a just, socialist Poland in which each nationality would have its cultural autonomy and in which minorities’ rights would be guaranteed.’

“When Hitler came to power, the Gestapo ordered Walter Benjamin’s arrest and he was forced to flee France by crossing the Pyrenees into Catalonia. Upon arriving at the border, Francisco Franco’s fascist government canceled all transit visas ordering the Spanish police to return Jewish refugees to Vichy France, a certain sentence of death.”

“How did Benjamin manage to slip into Spain?”

“He didn’t. Believing that he was going to be executed by the Gestapo, Benjamin committed suicide. His brother Georg was killed in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp.”

“Moses Mendelssohn’s dream,” Giovanni said, “of a Jewish enlightenment was terminated by the Third Reich. Herzl was right, establishing a Jewish state — Zionism was the only answer. If you roll over on your stomach, my darling, I’m going to work on your gluteus muscles.”

I rolled over and he slipped off my panties and began kneading my buttocks, sinking the heel of his hand into my bottom, rotating it back and forth while his other hand pushed the muscle towards the heel of his opposing hand, his strong and deep pressure reaching some very sore muscles.

“That’s divine. How did you learn this?”

“When I was competing in gymnastics in Italy, I started getting massages. I’ve never taken lessons, just practiced what the masseurs have showed me. Giacomo said that our derrières are made of three gluteus muscles: the gluteus maximus, gluteus medius, and gluteus minimus. The gluteus maximus is the strongest muscle in the body.”

“What does the gluteus maximus do?”

“It’s the muscle that allows us to lift and to rotate the hip, very important for dancers. That’s why ballet dancers have beautifully formed buttocks. The gluteus maximus allows us to climb stairs and maintain the torso in an erect posture so that humans can walk in a vertical position more easily than the primates from which we’ve evolved.”

“What does the gluteus medius and minimus do?”

“With the hip flexed, the gluteus medius and minimus allows us to rotate the thigh. These are the muscles which ballet dancers strengthen to produce a radical turn out of their leg. The body is a staggeringly complex creation. Considering the millions of minute details of bone, ligament, cartilage, muscle, blood vessels, air ways, and organs, you could say that the human body is a good argument for God.”

“Or the corollary,” I replied, “a good argument for the Devil.”

“Speaking of the Devil, I wonder if anti-Semitism in France would motivate Jews whose ancestors had lived in Europe for centuries to sell everything and move to a Palestine desert populated by Arabs.”

“Herzl proposed the idea for a Jewish homeland to a number of heads of state — the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, British minister for the colonies Joseph Chamberlain, and Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II who ruled Palestine. When Herzl approached Pope Pius X, a cardinal told him that as long as the Jews denied Christ as the son of God, the Church couldn’t make a declaration to support a Jewish homeland.”

“To leave the land,” Giovanni said, “where you were born and move to a foreign place would be a hard decision for anyone to make. It would take a deep rooted passion.”

“Herzl had that passion. He traveled all over searching for support in a time when travel wasn’t easy. During talks with the Egyptian government in Cairo, Britain approached Herzl with the idea of an autonomous region within British East Africa, but the Zionist Congress decided it wouldn’t be Uganda, only sacred Palestine. Herzl believed he could convince the rulers of nations to support his dream.



Theodor Herzl with his children Hans, Paulina, and Trude, 1900 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Despite a heroic effort, he failed. When he couldn’t find a nation to back his idea, He founded the First Zionist Congress in Basel and eventually the Congress established modern Zionism as a force. Herzl spent the remaining few years of his life convincing Jews and the world that establishing a Jewish State was the only way that Jews could truly find freedom. Herzl didn’t live to see his dream of Israel come true. He died from a heart attack at the age of 44.”

“He was young,” Giovanni said, “and yet he set a powerful idea in motion.”

“His son read the Kaddish over his grave even though Herzl was an atheist. It wouldn’t be until after the Holocaust that world Jewry united behind the Zionist movement. During the next half century, the British Foreign Secretary’s Balfour Declaration and the Mandate of the League of Nations recognized the right of a Jewish homeland. Lord Curzon who succeeded Balfour as Foreign Secretary opposed the Balfour Declaration because it denied the right of self-determination for the people of Palestine. Curzon said that 700,000 Arabs living in Palestine would never allow their land to be expropriated and become the laboring class for Jewish immigrants.”

“Now I can see,” Giovanni said, “the origins of the conflict. There were 700,000 Arabs who didn’t have any say about the Balfour Declaration for a Jewish homeland.”

PALESTINE FOR THE JEWS.

OFFICIAL SYMPATHY.

Mr. Balfour has sent the following letter to Lord Rothschild in regard to the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people :—

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of his Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to and approved by the Cabinet :—

His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Balfour Declaration, published 9 November
1917 – *The Times of London*, public domain,

“The imposition of the declaration without regard to the people of Palestine is the crux of the matter. While Herzl had pictured Palestine as largely an unoccupied space, nearly all the tillable soil was occupied by Arabs. Martin Buber, the Austrian-Jewish philosopher and scholar of myths, a professor at Hebrew University, was concerned about the rights of the indigenous population and disagreed with Herzl’s approach. Buber, who was the author of the famous essay on existence, *Ich und Du*, ‘I and thou.’ believed that Israel shouldn’t be a Jewish state, but rather a binational Jewish-Arab state. The Zionist movement, Buber believed, must reach a consensus with the Arabs, even at the expense of the Jews remaining a minority in Israel. Opposed to European methods of colonization, Buber becoming increasingly critical of Israel. He feared that a victory of the Jews over Arabs would ultimately be a defeat for Zionism. Rather than seizing a dominant position, Israel should seek a new mode of being — learn to live in peace and brotherhood with the Arab people while constructing a common republic in which both peoples were assured of freedom and prosperity, a philosophy which he shared with Albert Einstein. Born into an observant Orthodox Jewish family and a descendant of the 16th century Rabbi Meir Katenellenbogen, Buber broke with the Orthodox faith during a spiritual crisis. He began reading Immanuel Kant. Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche which inspired him to study philosophy.



Martin Buber and Rabbi Binyamin in Palestine, circa 1920-1930 – Unknown author, Central Zionist Archives, public domain. Wikimedia. Martin Buber was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature ten times and the Nobel Peace Prize seven times.

“A scholar of the Hasidic tradition, Buber lived in the unconditional presence of God. There was no separation between daily life and religious life — God was in all. While the goal of Herzl’s Zionism was to create a nation-state, Buber’s idea of Zionism was Hebraic humanism — to spiritually enrich the Judaic soul. ‘Someone needed,’ Buber said, ‘to accomplish for Judaism what Pope John XXIII had accomplished for the Catholic Church.’”

“Papa thought Pope John XXIII made wise decisions. Papa loved him. He was a sharecropper’s son who rose to the head of the church.”

“Pope John,” I said, “indeed brought enormous changes to the Church. He encouraged ecumenism and confessed for the Church’s anti-Semitism. Even back in the mid-19th century, Reform Jews in the U.S. had confirmed that Judaism was a religion, not a nationality. A reform rabbi said, America is our Palestine, this temple is our Jerusalem. Jewish ethical prophecy meant that Jews must not favor Jews at the expense of other people. Jews must be dedicated to the welfare of all peoples. An Israeli Palestinian had the same rights as an Israeli Jew.

“It sounds like,” Giovanni said, “Britain didn’t really know the solution to Palestine.”

“They were waffling back forth. One week they were encouraging the aspirations of Jews and the next week encouraging the aspirations of the Arabs. Lacking a consistent and transparent policy, Britain made promises to the Arabs and then betrayed those promises to the deep chagrin of T. E. Lawrence who’d fought so desperately for Arab independence.”

“T. E. Lawrence was a lot like Garibaldi,” Giovanni said with great enthusiasm. “*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was one of Papa’s favorite books. Papa thought Lawrence was as great a leader as Garibaldi. As a kid, I ran across a worn-out copy of Lowell Thomas’ book at the Viterbo library with photos of Lawrence of Arabia mounted on a camel leading Bedouin cavalry.”

“Lowell Thomas was a sensational promoter,” I laughed. “Hyperbole ran strong in his blood. Without Lowell’s newsreels glamorizing Lawrence’s exploits, the public would probably have never heard of him. To Lawrence’s credit, he told Thomas to interview Emir Feisal, the Hashemite leader who was the Arab leader in the fight against the Ottomans.”

“Lawrence had a fascinating background,” Giovanni said. “He was an archeologist before he was a warrior.”

“Even before Lawrence went to Oxford,” I said, “he was intrigued with ancient things, medieval military history, and strategy.

“He was influenced,” Giovanni said, “by Maurice de Saxe’s, *Mes Rêveries* on the art of war. He visited the sites of the battles of Rocroi, Crécy, Agincourt, and Sedan. Lawrence had a romantic fixation for feats of arms.”

“He practiced self-denial,” I said “pushed the limits of his endurance, building his stamina by bicycling 100 miles a day.”

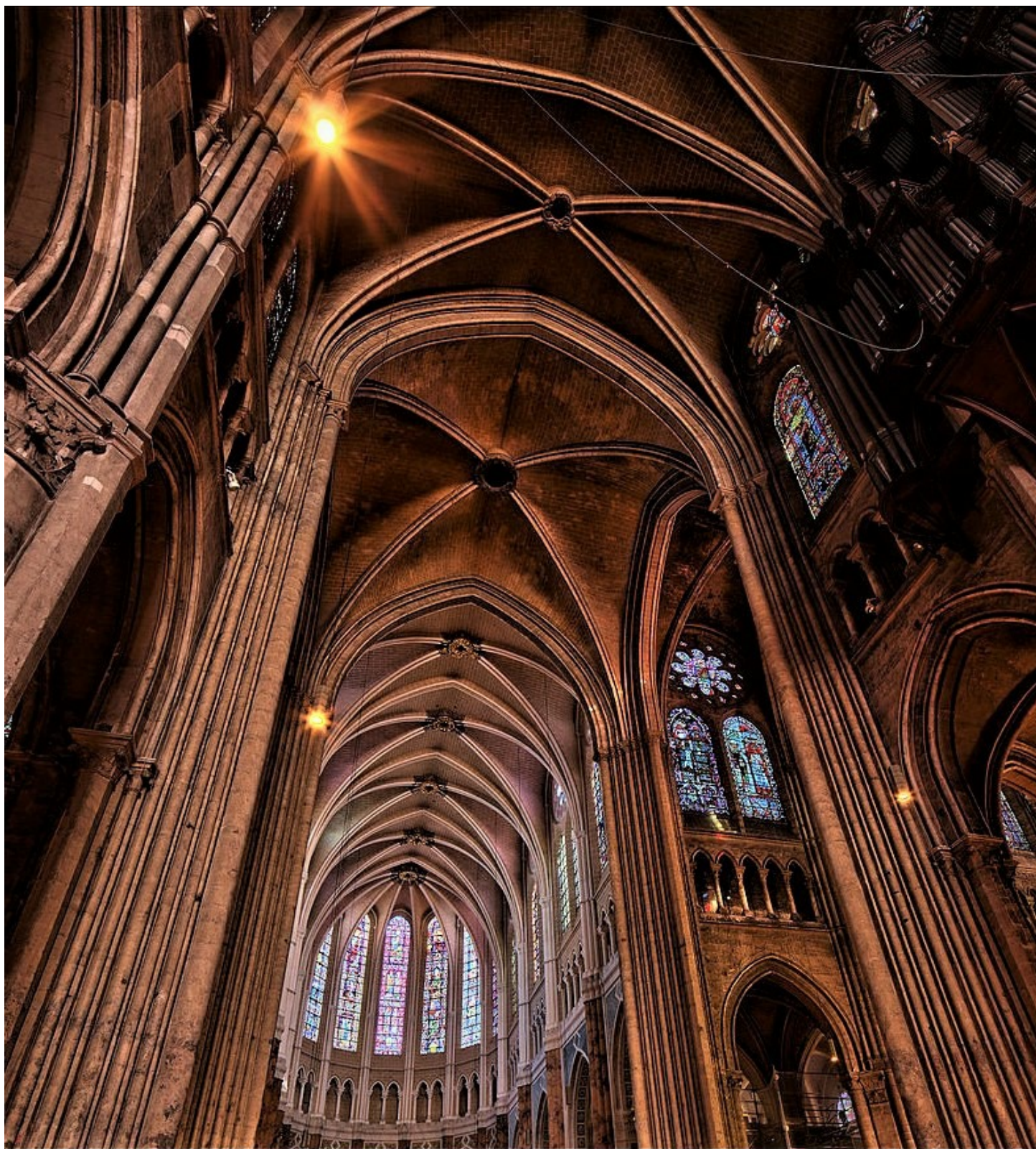
“Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “was notorious at Oxford or going two days without food and 48 hours without sleep to subjugate his body to his will.”

“On his summer vacation,” I said, “he cycled for 2,400 miles through France, visited the castles of Pierrefonds and Coucy, the picturesque medieval town of Cordes and the walled city of Carcassonne with its Roman, Visigoth, and Muslim Saracen styles of military construction. He didn’t realize that Viollet-le-Duc’s 19th century reconstructions of Carcassonne were not always authentic.

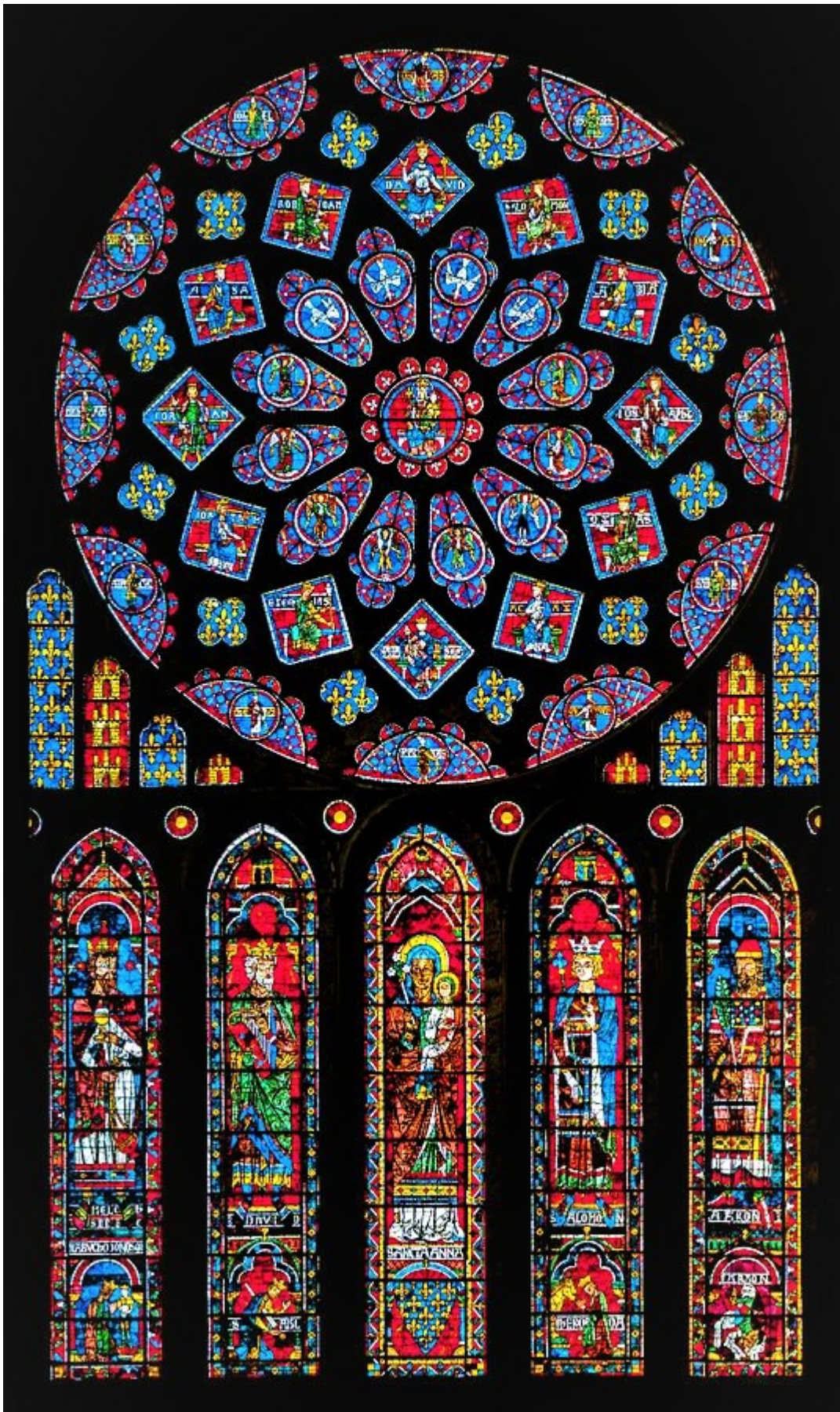


Walls of Medieval Carcassonne – Author, bmsgator, Wikimedia

“At Chartres Cathedral, Lawrence had a religious experience. He thought its three cavernous portals, stained glass, and exquisite carvings to be the finest achievement of the 12th and 13th century — a space where one could ‘truly worship God.’”



Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres. Nef et Chœur. Orgue et Vitraux – Author, MMensler, Wikimedia



Baie 121 Vitraux de la façade du transept Nord – Author, PtrQs, Wikimedia



La Cathédrale de Chartres la nuit – Author, Kreatinst, Wikimedia



Detail of the *Notre-Dame de la Belle-Verrière* – Author, Vassil, public domain, Wikimedia



Dammés et élus dans la baie centrale du portail Sud de la cathédral de Chartres – Author, Seudo, public domain, Wikimedia

“Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “graduated with First Class Honors for his thesis, *The Influence of the Crusades on European Military Architecture*. Like Lawrence, I love medieval stories, *chansons de geste*, Lancelot and Guinevere, and the doomed romance of Tristan and Iseult.”

“Lawrence got the idea,” I said, “of going to the Holy Land to study the Crusader castles from his mentor, the archeologist D. G. Hogarth, head of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. A true antiquary, Hogarth said, is born with the kind of mind that’s more curious about the past than the present. By researching the Crusader castles, Lawrence could combine his previous research on the castles of France. Lawrence not only began studying Arabic but took drawing lessons from an architectural illustrator, climbing the taller buildings of Oxford to practice perspective drawing from high angles. When Lawrence said he planned to go in the summer, Hogarth told him it was too hot. Lawrence said, ‘I’m going.’ Hogarth said, ‘You’ll need a guide and servants to carry your tent and baggage.’ Lawrence said, ‘I’m going to walk.’ Hogarth said, ‘It’s too dangerous. Europeans don’t walk in Syria.’ Lawrence said, ‘Well, I do.’”

“He had an astonishing ability to endure pain,” Giovanni said.

“On his tour of the Crusader castles,” I said, “he hiked through Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, from Nazareth north through the old Crusader States, Acre, Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, Antioch then into Syria, Aleppo, Carchemish, and Edessa.



Qalat Marqab, Crusader castle in Northern Syria – Author, Shayno, Wikimedia

“Christ! That’s a long hike. How many miles?”

“One thousand, walking an average of 20 miles a day, and once covering 36 miles in 13 hours. Along the way, Arabs honored him with hospitality often without payment, asking him dozens of questions, amazed that a European would travel on foot alone.”

“Hiking in 110-degree heat,” Giovanni said, “toughened Lawrence up for the grueling raids that were to come.”

“Another reason for Lawrence’s success with the Arabs,” I said, “was his ability to bond with them— sharing their food, embracing their customs, and appreciating their native dignity something that the Britains rarely mastered. In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, he said that he’d spent many years going up and down the Semitic East learning the manners of the villagers and tribesmen of Syria and Mesopotamia. His poverty forced him to mix with the humbler classes, those seldom met by European travelers. Lawrence’s experiences gave him a unique view allowing him to understand the ignorant as well as the enlightened and everywhere he’d gone he’d seen the signs of decay of imperial Turkey. He saw that the Bedouins had a freedom and honor which one didn’t find in farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. As Lawrence put it — the Bedouin’s soul embraces the barrenness of the desert. The Bedouin splendor in renunciation and self-denial. It allows him a ‘personal liberty which haunts starvation and death.’”



Krac des Chevaliers, Syria – Author, Ergo, Wikimedia

“That’s what pulled me to Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “his warrior ascetic. I believe that a musician has to practice the same self-denial to achieve his goal. Lawrence’s ability to identify with Arab culture allowed him to accomplish what he did in the Hejaz. Lawrence understood the fatalism of the Bedouin. When I was reading *Seven Pillars* I inscribed his words in my journal, ‘The desert Arab found no joy like the joy of voluntarily holding back. He found luxury in abnegation, renunciation, and self-restraint. He made nakedness of the mind as sensuous as nakedness of the body.’”

“Near Homs, Syria,” I said, “the desert mystic discovered his favorite castle, the massive Krac des Chevaliers.”

“Krac des Chevaliers,” Giovanni said, “was the headquarters of the Knights Hospitallers which along with the Knights Templar, was the most powerful of the Roman Catholic military orders. After the conquest of Jerusalem, the Pope made the Knights Hospitallers responsible for the defense of the Holy Land. Lawrence spent three days examining and sketching Krac des Chevaliers. He called it the ‘finest castle in the world.’”



Krak des Chevaliers, Crusader Castle – Shutterstock 134921657



Krak des Chevaliers Chapel – Bgag, Wikimedia

“After several months of walking in the heat,” I said, “Lawrence was exhausted. “With his boots falling to pieces, feet rubbed raw, cut and blistered so badly that by the time he got back to Beirut, he had to wait for his aching feet to heal before he went on. After he finished his thesis on the Crusader castles, he went to work with the famed Oxford archaeologist David George Hogarth on the dig at Carchemish, the capitol of the Hittite Empire in the Late Bronze Age. The Book of Jeremiah tells of a great battle there — the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the forces of Egypt and Assyria at Carchemish which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jewish elite during the Babylonian Exile. Located at the ford across the Euphrates, Carchemish was close to the Baghdad Railway, the Ottoman Empire’s main line to Arabia. Lawrence’s experience living with the Arabs when he was excavating the ruins at Carchemish, proved to be valuable in the Arab Revolt.”

“Was Carchemish in Iraq?”



T.E. Lawrence and C. Leonard Woolley at the archaeological excavations at Carchemish, Syria, circa 1912-1914 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“It’s on the border of Syria and Turkey, near Jerablus 100 kilometers northeast of Aleppo. At the Carchemish excavation, Lawrence met archeologist Gertrude Bell who would help him two years later to organize the Arab uprising against the Ottomans. Bell told him that their ideas of digging were prehistoric. Lawrence retaliated with a blast of erudition — a discussion of Assyrian, Byzantine Crusader, Roman and Hittite architecture, Mesopotamia ethnology, the Young Turks, German railway construction methods, and the price of camels.”

“That,” Giovanni laughed, “either impressed her or alienated her.”

“She wrote to her family, “An interesting boy. He’ll make a traveler.”

“Giovanni said, “It must have been unusual,” Giovanni said, “for a woman to be an archeologist at the turn of the century.”



**Gertrude Bell, author and archeologist in Babylon, Iraq, 1909 –
Gertrude Bell Archive, public domain, Wikimedia**

“Gertrude Lowthian Bell was an unusual woman in every respect. Born into a wealthy family of iron masters, her grandfather, Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, a metallurgical chemist, founded iron ore mines, blast furnaces, and the first factory making aluminum, his sprawling enterprises at one time employing 50,000 men. Bell was the first woman to get a first-class degree in modern history at Oxford, the first woman to travel alone throughout the Middle East and the first woman to become a ranking officer in British military intelligence. With a passion for archeology and language, Bell became fluent in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, French, and German.



Gertrude Bell, author of *The Desert and the Sown: Travels in Palestine and Syria*, 1907 – Gertrude Bell Archive, fair use, Wikimedia

“An unrelenting Alpinist, she climbed several of the Bernese Alps and was the first to climb Gertrudspitze, which was named after her. Bell was once stranded hanging on a rope from a cliff for two days in an ice storm before being rescued. An atheist and a chain smoker who wore a pistol strapped to her calf under petticoats of silk and lace, Bell trekked across the desert on camel back in 1914 to Ha’il to evaluate the strengths of the al-Rashid family versus Abdulaziz ibd Saud, the future King of Hejaz. For a time, she was held captive by the fierce al-Rashid family. Her trek made her legendary in Orientalist circles for no European in twenty years had travelled to Ha’il.”

“Hard to imagine an upper-class woman doing that in that time.”

“And,” I said, “Like Lawrence, Bell was five feet five. Historians have speculated that Gertrude’s attraction to dangerous behavior and depressions were a result of losing her mother when she was three. Her depressions must have been deepened by a great disappointment in love. After a betrothal in her twenties to a diplomat had been broken off by her father, Bell fell in love with Maj. Charles Doughty-Wylie, a British consul in Turkey. Their passionate love affair may have remained chaste, for her lover was married to a woman who either refused him a divorce or he didn’t have the courage to divorce. From the desert, Bell wrote to the major, ‘It is one in the morning of Sunday. I’ve tried to sleep, every night it becomes less and less possible. You, and you, and you are between me and any rest; but out of your arms there is no rest.’ For three years, she wrote to her lover until the amphibious assault at Gallipoli where he was shot down on the beach by Turkish fire.”

“Ah, Gallipoli, where so many died for nothing.”

“During Bells travels across the Ottoman Empire in 1915, Bell wrote home about the horrors of the Armenian genocide. The Kurds, ordered by the Turks to kill all the Armenian men, sold Armenian women in the slave market. Bell discovered desert cisterns stuffed with decomposing corpses. Once the Ottomans entered the war on the side of Germany, Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence were recruited by archaeologist David Hogarth to work with British intelligence in the Arab Bureau at Cairo. Bell, who possessed a legendary ability to charm Arab leaders, essentially operated as a spy for the Brits by meeting with leaders of the Howeitat tribes and providing T. E. Lawrence with critical information on the Hejaz Railway and the Turkish garrison at Aqaba. What Lawrence’s learned about Arab culture and geography while excavating the Carchemish ruins and his mastery of Arabic was critical during the Arab Revolt.’

“I didn’t realize that Lawrence was a spy.”

“The intelligence work that Bell and Lawrence did before the war prepared them for their rendezvous with destiny. It’s fascinating how many similar characteristics there are between Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence.”

“How were they alike?”

“They earned degrees at Oxford in history and were self-taught in archeology. Both had the ability to ride through the desert for days on end, and both suffered tragedies in their love life. Bell and Lawrence, two eccentric characters, had a great impact on the creation of the modern states of the Middle East.”



Oxford University – Author, Oxford University Press, fair use

“How on earth, “Giovanni exclaimed, “could an intellectual like Lawrence with a degree in history without a single day of military training, become one of the most notable military heroes of the century?”

“The short answer was imagination, courage, and a lot of luck.”

“What’s the long answer?”

“With the threat of war looming and the prediction that the Ottoman government would join on the side of Germany, the British government began planning how to defend the Suez Canal from a Turkish attack.”

“Naturally,” Giovanni said, “the canal was the lifeline between Britain and India.”

“The British government elected Stewart Newcombe, a hero of the Boer War, to recruit the archeologists at Carchemish, Leonard Woolley and T. E. Lawrence to make a military survey of the Negev Desert.”

“That is hard to believe. Why would the Ottomans allow the Brits to do a military survey in their territory?”

“That’s a good question. However, the Brits managed to convince the Ottomans that they were conducting an archaeological survey of Biblical sites in the Wilderness of Zin.”

“Incredible that the Ottomans would buy that.”



Ein Avdat, Zin Valley in the Negev Desert, Israel – Author, Godot13, Andrew Shiva, Wikimedia

“Someone made up a convincing story,” I laughed, “Of course the survey was a fabrication to fool the Turks, but oddly the Ottomans didn’t fathom that. The Ottomans believed that the Oxford archeologists, financed by the ‘Palestinian Exploration Fund,’ were going to survey the ancient sites of the Israelite Exodus. For the Brits, it was a strategic undertaking. If the Ottomans sided with Germany, a Turkish army attacking the Suez Canal would have to cross the Wilderness of Zin. The archeological survey provided cover for Woolley and Lawrence, who were essentially British intelligence agents mapping the terrain, mountain passes, and water sources of the Negev. During the Exodus, Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the Sinai Peninsula where Yahweh revealed the Ten Commandments and the Israelites spent thirty-eight years in the Wilderness of Zin near Petra, Jordan. In Deuteronomy, Yahweh said to the Israelites, ‘Ye trespassed against me in the midst of the children of Israel at the waters of Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.’ While there are a few ruins from the Byzantine era, Lawrence discovered no sites in the Negev dating from 1300 years before Christ. There were only three built houses between Beersheba and Akaba. It was so hot the Bedouins moved out of the Wilderness of Zin in summer. Wooley said that it was amazing that the Children of Israel left Moses alive after bringing him to a place like that.”

“The archeology survey,” Giovanni said, “must have helped him a great deal in the attack on the Turkish stronghold of Akaba.”

“Lawrence described the harsh terrain of the Negev as sometimes impassable by camel, even difficult to cross on foot. While they didn’t find any Biblical sites, they found what they were looking for — the key passes through the mountains leading to Akaba. After the survey, he returned to the digs at Carchemish, where he peacefully resolved a potentially bloody revolt of Kurdish workers against the German engineers building the Ottoman railway bridge across the Euphrates River. On his vacation in England, he labored on the archeological report for the Palestine Exploration Fund, including adding plans and illustrations, meeting again with Gertrude Bell who’d he’d met at Carchemish. Bell had returned to Britain after her famous voyage through Arabia and spent hours with Lawrence discussing the Bedouin tribes between the Hejaz railway and the Nefud desert where it rains only once or twice a year. Bell told him a great deal about the Howeitat tribe which would ultimately join Lawrence’s forces in the Arab Revolt.”

“Mastering the terrain,” Giovanni said, “is how you master the battle.”

“Right before his 26th birthday, Britain declared war on Germany. Lawrence would never see the Carchemish excavation again. While mapping the Wilderness of Zin, Captain Stewart Newcombe and Lawrence had made a bond that would last a lifetime. Newcombe was one of the pallbearers at Lawrence’s funeral. After finishing the *Military Report on the Sinai Peninsula*, Newcombe, now Chief of the British Military Mission for the Hejaz, asked Lawrence to work with him as an intelligence officer in the Arab Bureau in Cairo, a city swarming with hundreds of thousands of troops from India, Australia, and New Zealand pouring through the Suez Canal on the way to the killing fields of the Western Front.”

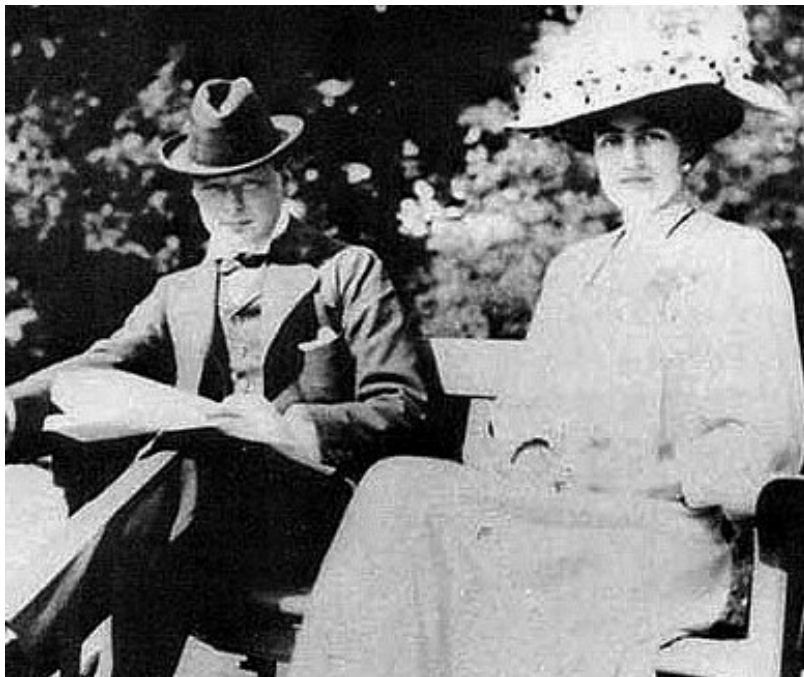
“It’s hard to imagine,” Giovanni said, “an adventurer like T. E. Lawrence tied down to a desk job.”

“His desk job helped him to prepare for his campaigns. With not much to do at the Savoy Hotel in Cairo but to read intelligence reports and study the maps he’d pinned up on the walls of the Arab Bureau, Lawrence determined that the most vulnerable point of the Ottoman Empire was the Gulf of Alexandretta, the point where Syria meets Turkey on the Mediterranean. With the best natural harbor and flat landscape lying on the east, it was ideal for an amphibious landing. From his recent journey through the region at Captain Newcombe’s request, Lawrence had discovered that the Germans hadn’t completed the tunnels for the Ottoman railway in the Taurus and Amanus Mountains north of Alexandretta. Another salient factor was that the main highway linking Anatolia to the southern Mediterranean coast was in miserable shape. With no way to quickly move troops by land or rail, Alexandretta would be nearly impossible for the Turks and Germans to defend.

Gertrude Bell's book, *The Desert and the Sown*, had noted that Alexandretta was inhabited primarily by Arabs, Christian Armenians, and Turks. On his return to Britain through Jerablus, Lawrence had learned that the Arab workers were clashing with the German railway engineers. From his years at Jerablus, he knew that the Arabs and Armenians of northern Syria resented the Ottomans. Lawrence believed that an amphibious landing with a few thousand troops could seize Alexandretta, cut the Ottoman Empire in two, and unleash an uprising of Syrians and Armenians against the Turks."

"But of course," Giovanni laughed, "no one was listening to Lawrence but Lawrence."

"Back in London, First Lord of the Admiralty was appalled by the stalemate on the Western Front and the massive number of deaths in trench warfare. As a way out of the stalemate, he urged the War Council to open a second front on the Baltic coast to force Germany to divert troops from the western and eastern fronts.



Winston Churchill and his fiancée Clementine Hozier before their marriage, 1908 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

"But the admirals of the fleet said they weren't going to risk their latest battleships in heavily minded coastal waters. Lord Kitchener agreed with Churchill that the Western Front had become a siege line impossible to be breached and proposed an invasion of Alexandretta with the Australian and New Zealand Army Corp, ANZAC troops. If Alexandretta were seized, it would sever Constantinople from Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia, by one fell swoop."

"Which was the same thing that Lawrence was proposing."



Gallipoli Peninsula, map of the Dardanelles drawn by G.F. Morrell, 1915. Gallipoli peninsula and west coast of Turkey, and the location of front line troops and landings – State Library of New South Wales, public domain, Wikimedia

“But Churchill had another idea.

“What was that?”

“A naval attack on the Dardanelles peninsula. Since Xerxes led Persian armies across the straits to attack Greece, the straits between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea had been fought over. Forts had been built on the strategic Dardanelles since antiquity — Ottoman forts constructed on the foundations of Byzantine forts, constructed on Roman forts, constructed on Greek forts. The Admiral of the Mediterranean fleet was skeptical of sending a fleet through the heavily defended straits. The Admiralty thought that Churchill was pushing the naval invasion too fast, not giving the planners enough time to plan an assault. The admirals thought quite correctly that in the constricted waters of the Dardanelles strait, mines were a threat which couldn’t be ignored. Considering himself a military strategist, Churchill overrode the fears of the commanders and convinced the War Council and Kitchener to approve a naval attack to force the straits and attack Istanbul.”

“This sounds the prelude to a disaster.”

“Lawrence was horrified, when he heard of the Gallipoli plan. Mind you, Lawrence had no military experience at this point, and yet he saw the futility of the plan while the War Council did not. Lawrence redoubled his efforts to persuade the Arab Bureau in Cairo to push for the Alexandretta landing, but London was completely oblivious to the ideas of an obscure intelligence officer in Cairo.”

“With their success,” Giovanni said abruptly, “in the Sedan and the Boer War, how could Lord Kitchener and Churchill, make such a foolish judgment?”

“Don’t forget, Churchill’s original idea was to use the British navy to force the straits, *not* an amphibious landing by the army. The idea to force a way through the straits by using obsolete warships was not the worst decision. The worst decision was the British War Council’s choice of staging an amphibious troop landing on the Dardanelles instead of at Alexandretta.”

“Something is missing here,” Giovanni persisted. “With all of the reasons to attack at Alexandretta there had to be a greater reason to make the War Council to change their mind.”

“You’re right, there was a reason.”

“Which was . . . ?”

“The French.”

“What did the French have to do with it?”

“The French had so many men killed on the Western Front that they couldn’t come up with the troops for a second front, though they finally sent some to Gallipoli. While the Middle East is not my field of expertise, Emile who has lectured on the Arab world since his university, told me that the French bitterly opposed the British landing on the coast of Syria. The French saw Syria and Lebanon as their *promised mandate*. If the Brits conquered Alexandretta, they would be in a position to control Syria. The French were against the British attacking at Alexandretta because Syria was their sphere of influence.

“And there was another contributing factor. Russia was cut off by land and sea in the Baltic. Russia desperately needed supplies and munitions from the West. Once the Turks invaded Russia in the Caucasus, it prevented Russia from receiving shipments through the Black Sea. Grand Duke Nicholas appealed to Britain to seize the Dardanelles Straits and send critical armaments into Russia. Britain’s First Sea Lord Admiral was against the idea, but Churchill ignored the admiral’s advice and in early 1915, ordered an attack on the

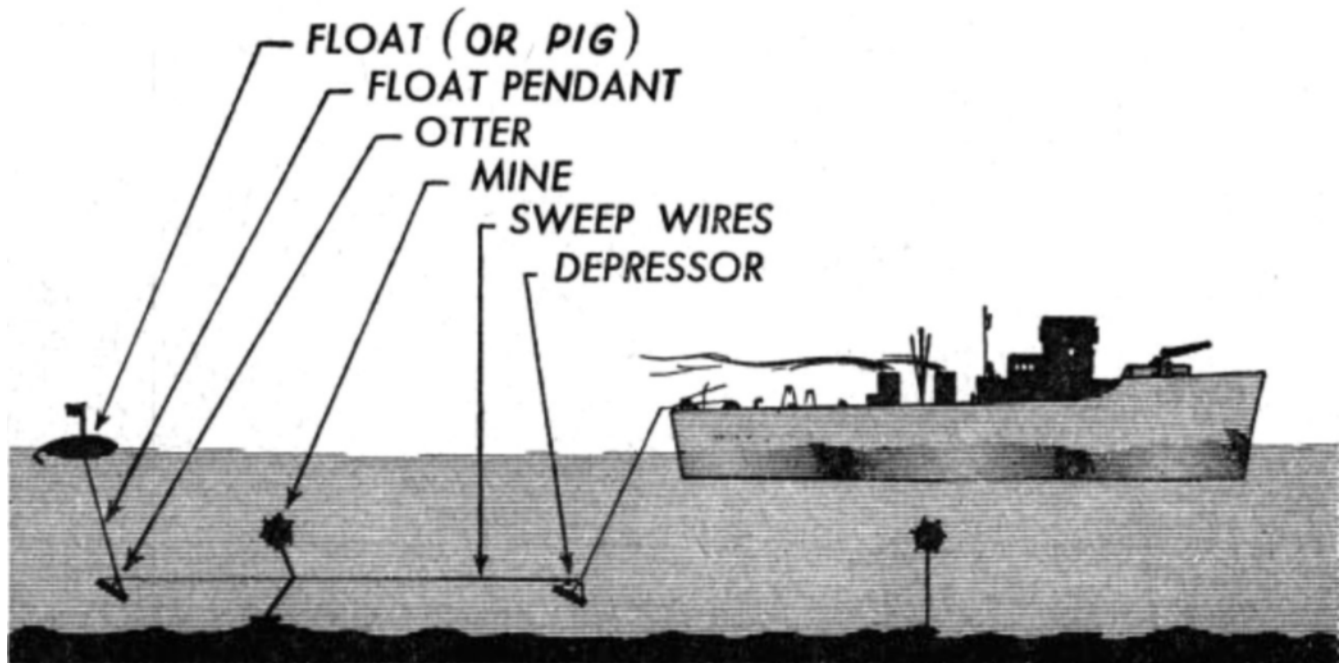


Diagram of minesweeper cutting loose moored mines – Author U.S. Navy, public domain, Wikimedia

Dardanelles with a fleet of obsolete battleships. Under long range bombardment, the Turks abandoned their outer forts, but their mobile artillery made it impossible for the British minesweepers to clear the mines. The primary weaknesses of the battle plan was that the minesweepers were manned by civilian employees who weren't willing to work under fire.”

“I can see right now,” Giovanni said, “the mines were going to sink the ships.”

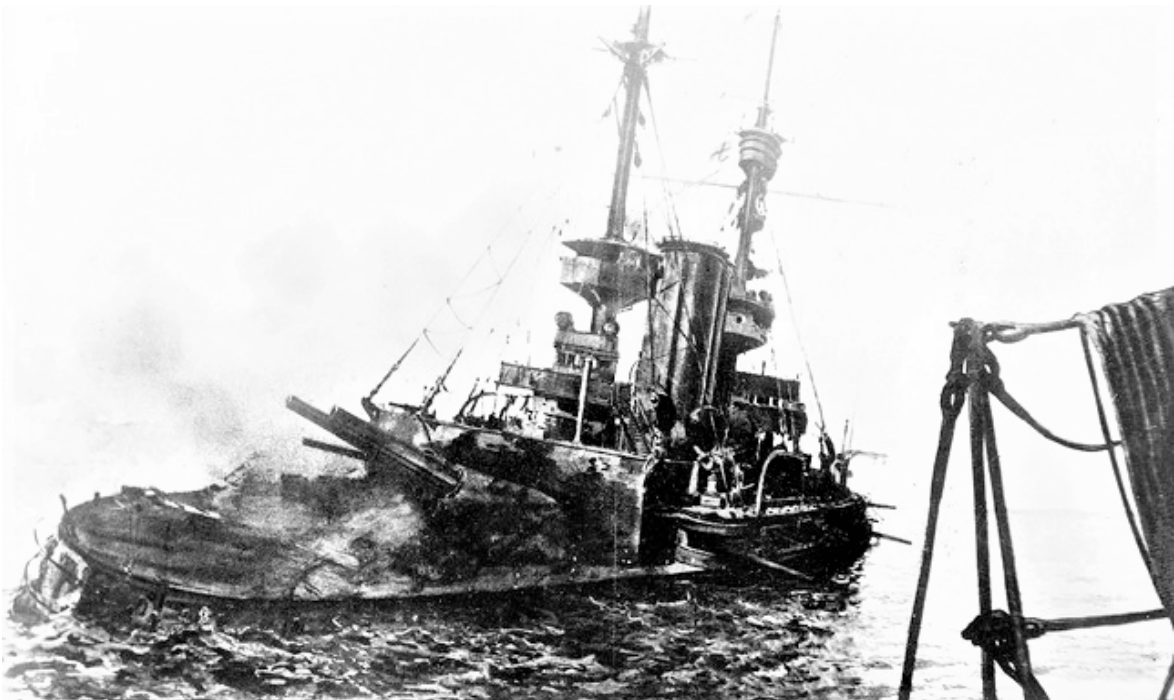
“You guessed right. As the Allied cruisers and battleships entered the straits, Turkish mobile batteries and undetected mines sank three ships and damaged many others. The French battleship, *Bouvet* struck mines and sunk in two minutes with 700 aboard. Only 50 survived. It was the worst Allied naval disaster of the battle. Even the rescue ship, the *Irresistible* struck a mine and sank. The fleet commander, Admiral De Robeck was bewildered because he didn't understand that the reason his ships had been sunk was because aerial reconnaissance hadn't discovered the previous night the Turks laying a line of mines parallel to the shore rather than across the straits. Confronted with the loss of the *Bouvet* and two British battleships, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Fisher decided to abandon the attack. Ironically, the decision was made at the very moment that morale had disintegrated in Constantinople with people fleeing the city, gold reserves sent to safety and trains prepared to move the Sultan and the government into the interior. Unaware of the panic in Constantinople, the Admiralty decided to call off the attack until General Sir Ian Hamilton could organize an expeditionary force in Cairo for an amphibious landing on the beach.”



Dardanelles Fleet, Gallipoli Campaign, 1915 – Author, Jonathan Schroden, public domain, Wikimedia



Ottoman guns and mines sank British and French ships at Gallipoli – Everett Historical, Shutterstock



British battleship *HMS Irresistible* sinks after being hit by mines laid by the Ottoman minelayer *Nusret* that undetected had laid mines at night – *The War Illustrated*, 1915, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



French battleship *Bouvet* struck by mines at Gallipoli sank within two minutes, killing 639 of a crew of 710, 18 March 1915 – Public domain, New Zealand.govt

“Just at the very moment,” Giovanni said, “they were winning the fight, they quit. That must have killed Churchill.”

“It gets worse. Just as the Admiralty made the decision to halt the attack, naval intelligence decoded an intercepted message from the Kaiser which confirmed that the Turks had run out of ammunition. With the artillery batteries silent, the minesweepers could have cleared the way for the ships to enter the Sea of Marmara and attack Constantinople. When he heard the news, an outraged Churchill told the War Cabinet that the naval campaign must go on. Otherwise, a great opportunity would be lost. The delay would give the Turks the time to prepare for an attack by land. The Admiralty high command refused to budge. As a civilian administrator, Churchill was unable to override the Admirals. Prime Minister Asquith believed Churchill was right but ruled that even the prime minister couldn’t override the Sea Lords. Unaware that the Brits had given up, the Turks gave orders to the forts to fire their remaining salvos and abandon coastal positions. Without opposing artillery fire, the minesweepers were free to clear a path. If the fleet had renewed the attack, they would’ve steamed unopposed through the Dardanelles straits and taken Constantinople. Instead, De Robeck turned his ships around and sailed away.”

“In war,” Giovanni said thoughtfully, “it’s astounding what hinges on the possession of accurate intelligence.”

“It’s a question whether commanders are able to decide what intelligence to believe and what not to believe. The failure of the Admiralty to take seriously the intercepted Kaiser’s message doomed thousands of British, Australian, and New Zealanders to death.”

“By pulling out,” Giovanni said, “the Brits gave the Turks the advantage. The Turks could replenish their ammunition, call up the reserves and dig in. Plus they’d lost the element of surprise.”

“That’s what happened. In the midst of the crisis, Turkish Minister of War Ever Pasha turned over command of the Ottoman forces to the German general, Liman von Sanders. It was the unheard-of case of Muslim soldiers serving under the command of a Christian general.



General Otto Liman von Sanders, commander of the Ottoman army during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign – Author, Bain News Service, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Von Sanders made the fateful decision to give a key field command to Mustapha Kemal, an officer who had struggled to modernize the Turkish Army but had been kept in obscurity by his superiors. While Kemal was training his troops and preparing the forts which dominated the beaches, General Ian Hamilton was given obsolete maps and a sketchy invasion plan borrowed from the Greek army. Prewar British military studies had concluded that an attack on Gallipoli was foolhardy, but Lord Kitchener persisted in believing that the Turks would surrender rather than fight.”



Colonel Mustafa Kemal Bey with Ottoman military officers, Battle of Gallipoli, 1915 – Source, Gelibolu Çanakkale, public domain, Wikipedia

“When their backs are against the wall,” Giovanni said, “the Turks have a reputation for being tough fighters.”

“Kitchener’s view of the Turks was probably informed by his victory in the Battle of Omdurman, Khartoum where his army of 25,000 defeated an army twice as large killing 10,000 of the Sudanese Dervishes while losing only 50 of his own. British officers were convinced of their superiority over Turkish and Arab fighters, but the soldiers who survived the landing on the beaches of Gallipoli discovered that the British hierarchy was wrong. Under the command of Mustapha Kemal, the Turks fought heroically.”

“In Viet Nam and Algeria,” Giovanni said, “the French made the same mistake of underestimating their enemy.”

“The tragedy of Gallipoli was not having a clue about what they were going to face. From the very first it didn’t go right. The British navy landed the Australians and New Zealanders, the Anzac troops, on the wrong beach which had steep slopes to the ridges high above. Rallied by Mustafa Kemal, the Turks drove the Australians and New Zealanders back to the beach. On another beach, Turkish machine-gunners on the heights wiped out a couple of hundred disembarking infantrymen. Only 21 men reached the beach. At another point, only eleven survived being wounded or killed of the one thousand Dublin Fusiliers who hit the



Australian and New Zealand troops landing at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli – National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand, Wikimedia

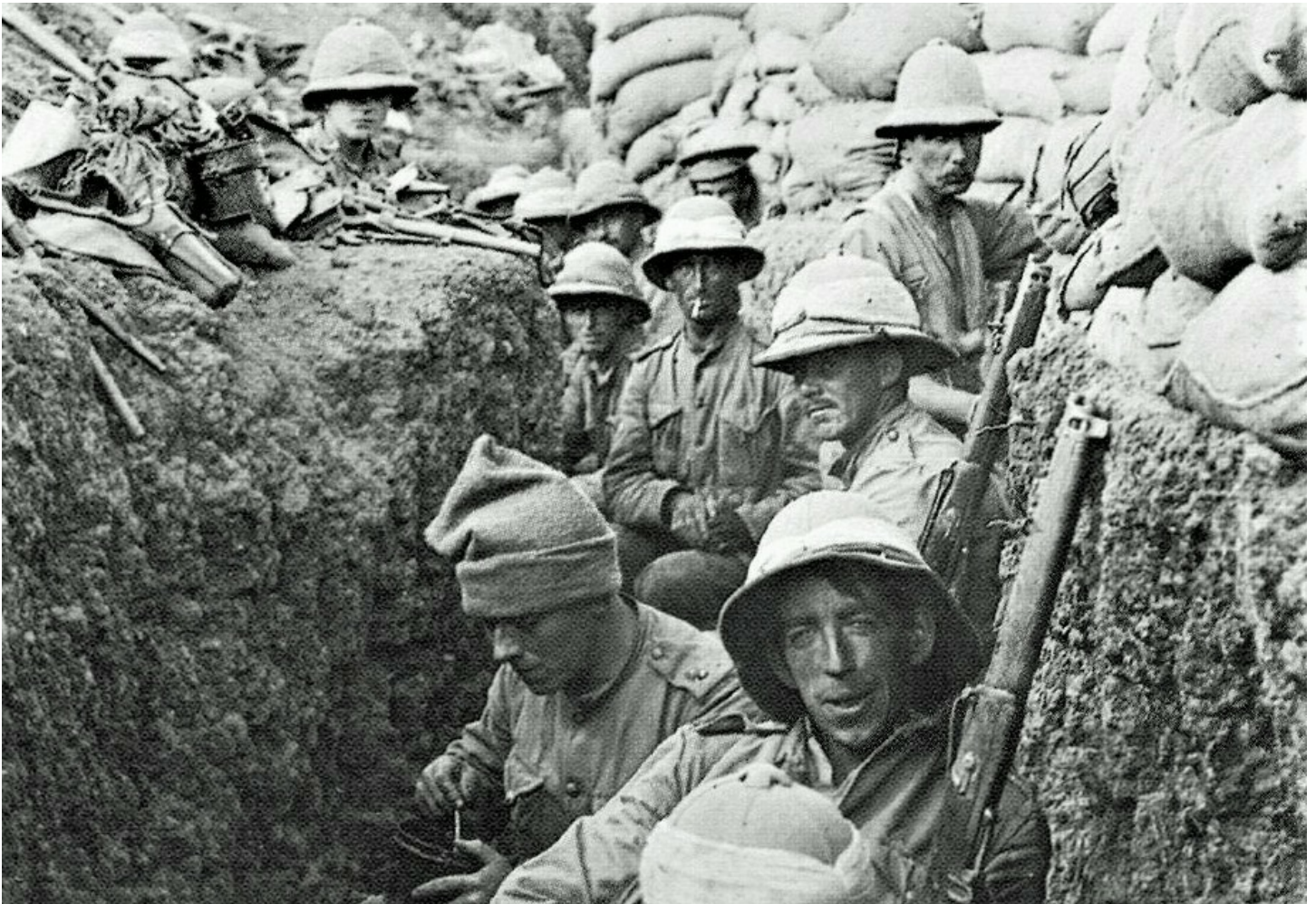
beach. On other beaches, the Allied soldiers were lightly opposed and climbed quickly to the top of the cliff and then made a fatal error of returning to the beach. Others made camp on the ridge instead of surging forward to overwhelm the small Turkish garrison.”

“The Allies,” Giovanni said, “evidently didn’t have a Garibaldi or a Patton.”

“By not advancing,” I said, “the landing lost momentum. It gave von Lemn the time to bring up his reserves and push back the Allied forces which didn’t have mechanized transport and tanks to push forward quickly. They were still fighting the wars of the Napoleonic era. The lack of swift motorized transportation ended up burying them in the trenches.”

“You’re saying,” Giovanni said, “that the same thing happened in Gallipoli as on the Western Front?”

“Exactly. The Gallipoli campaign became bogged down in the same trench warfare, the same nihilistic pit of death. Engineers from the gold mines in Australia constructed elaborate architectural structures with



Royal Irish Fusiliers, Gallipoli Campaign, 1915 – Author, Ernest Brooks, public domain Australian War Memorial, Wikimedia

communication and supply corridors to the front lines. The Turks and the Allies were digging tunnels under the opposing trenches, stuffing the tunnels with explosives and igniting them and slaughtering hundreds. To stop the burrowing enemy, the sappers, the mole warriors on both sides dug defensive tunnels to intercept the enemy's tunnels. Once they found the opposing diggers, they fought raging firefights underground transforming the Battle of Gallipoli into a subterranean war — Charon in the underworld, carrying the souls of the dead across the River Styx.”

“The mole warriors.”

“The summer heat brought an epidemic of flies. It was hard to eat when bloated and putrid corpses were decomposing all around, thousands of men suffering from disease and dysentery. Autumn rains drowned men in the trenches. The winter gales froze them to death.”

“Didn't anyone,” Giovanni asked, “recognize they were in a futile fight?”

“In every military disaster, there are officers who divine the truth, but no one listens. When General Birdwood, the commander of the Australian and New Zealand troops, saw the ferocious defense of the Turks who commanded the high ground, he knew it was fruitless to continue. Birdwood recommended to General



Lancashire landing, W Beach, Gallipoli, 1916 – Author, Ernest Brooks, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Turkish machine gun unit with German officers, Gallipoli, Dardanelles, Turkey 1915 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

Hamilton to abandon the assault. But Sir Ian Hamilton had his career on the line. He ordered them to dig in against the brutal Turkish defense.

“Mustafa Kemal sent a command to his 57th infantry regiment, ‘I do not order you to fight, I order you to die.’ And die they did. Every man in the Ottoman 57th Regiment was either wounded or killed. The battle of the trenches took the lives of a quarter of a million British, Australian, New Zealand, Irish and French soldiers and nearly a quarter million Turks. The question remains — could it have been avoided?”

“What explains,” Giovanni asked, “the ability of the Turks to repel a more advanced, well-equipped army?”

“The Turkish morale was strong,” I answered. “They were defending their homeland against the infidel. It could also have been that the Turks were stronger because they ate better. While the Australians and Brits

consumed nothing but bully beef in tin cans, the nearby Turkish villages brought fresh vegetables and meat to the soldiers who cooked in the brick ovens they built in the trenches.



Turkish troops at Gallipoli manning a German naval gun transferred from a German ship – German Federal Archive, Wikimedia



Ottoman soldiers repulsed the Anzac, British, and French at Gallipoli – Everett Historical, Shutterstock



Ottoman artillery battery at Gallipoli, 1915 – Unknown author, Bain News Service, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



Australian troops charging a Turkish trench – Unknown author, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia



Captain Leslie Morshead inspecting the Australian and Turkish dead after the Lone Pine battle, Gallipoli, 1915 – Unknown author, public domain, Australian War Memorial, Wikimedia



Australian sniper with periscope rifle, 2nd Light Horse Regiment, Gallipoli, 1915 – Author, Ernest Brooks, public domain, Imperial War Museum, Wikipedia



Greek boys collecting the bones of soldiers slain in the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign, Hill 60, Anzac Cove, 1919 – Author, W. J. Brunell, public domain, Imperial War Museum, Wikimedia



Anzac bunker, Dardanelles Campaign – Zarnell Photography, Shutterstock



Lancashire landing, W Beach, during final evacuation of British forces, Gallipoli, 1916. Turkish artillery shell strikes in the background – Author, Ernest Brooks, public domain, Imperial War Museum, Wikimedia

“Once Bulgaria entered the war on the side of the Germans, it enabled the Axis powers to transport heavy artillery across Bulgaria to devastate the Anzac and British troops. Modern aircraft and Austro-Hungary artillery units arrived making it hard for the Allies to survive let alone make any advance. Trenches of the two sides were so close that they were enclosed with wire netting to catch the grenades hurled from the enemy. Astonished by the overwhelming casualties, the Allies hadn’t provided enough hospital ships. With insufficient medics in the field, they couldn’t evacuate the wounded swiftly, leaving them lying in the sun begging for water until they died.”

“How did they finally decide to give up?”

“After eight months of bloodletting, Kitchener and the Cabinet agreed to abandon Gallipoli. The precarious evacuation was the only remarkable success of the war. Although Winston Churchill wasn’t the



Hobart Cenotaph in Tasmania, Australia with wreaths laid to commemorate ANZAC Day, 25 April – Author, Edoddrige, Wikimedia

author of the land invasion, he ended up being the scapegoat. Lord Kitchener was too admired a figure to be blamed. The people thought it must be a civilian making the wrong military decisions. Later, many historians have concluded that it was Britain's generals and admirals who were the ones losing the war. The war effort needed more, not less civilian control.

“Due to the state of Turkish defenses and scarcity of ammunition at the time of the naval attack, if the War Office had listened to Churchill instead of the Admiralty, the Dardanelles campaign could have been won with a several hundred casualties instead of suffering a quarter of a million deaths. Or if they had ignored the French and landed at Alexandretta, the Ottoman Empire might have collapsed even before the Arab Revolt. Blamed for the failure of Gallipoli and accused of being uncaring of the misery of the troops, Churchill was forced out of the Admiralty. After Gallipoli, the Ottoman War was viewed as Churchill's fault. Believing that his political career was over, he went over to fight in the trenches of France. For the rest of his life, the failure of the Dardanelles campaign tormented Churchill and thirty years later during the Normandy amphibious landing, the disaster of Dardanelles conjured up in Churchill, fear of failure.”

“Despite the failure at Gallipoli, Churchill survived to become Prime Minister.”

“That was many years later,” I said. “But they did learn from the Dardanelles campaign an important lesson about amphibious landings. During the Second World War, when Australian forces landed on New Guinea, they didn’t make the mistake of Gallipoli. Once again landing on the wrong beach, the Aussies kept their momentum and quickly penetrated inland. For Australia and New Zealand, Gallipoli was an existential moment — a remembered moment in the evolution of their nation. To memorialize the date of the Dardanelles landing, the Aussies have made 25th of April, a national holiday to honor those who died at Gallipoli.”

“Besides studying the maps of the Hejaz and Palestine,” Giovanni said, “what was Lawrence doing in Cairo?”

“He started issuing daily intelligence bulletins for the ‘edification of 28 generals,’ information he picked up from talking with other intelligence agents, travelers, interrogation of prisoners, captured documents, and the new technique of mapping by aerial photographs. He tracked the movements of British forces and made a directory of the Bedouin tribes of Northern Arabia. When interviewing prisoners, many who were Arabs, he’d ask about their tribes and then talk about friends who he knew in their districts, which enabled him to learn things other agents wouldn’t have discovered. Each day, a vast amount of military information passed across his desk, his production of the intelligence bulletins giving him an encyclopedic knowledge of the Ottoman Empire. While processing mountains of intelligence, Lawrence came to his conclusions about what to do. With Britain’s forces locked in a bloody stalemate with the Germans on the Western Front, Lawrence concluded that the best strategy would be for the Arabs to attack the Turks through asymmetrical warfare.”

“What’s asymmetrical warfare?”

“Asymmetrical warfare is when a smaller force has the ability to succeed against a bigger force.”

“How could that work?”

“Lawrence figured that it would require a great many Ottoman garrisons to defend against a small number of Arab insurgents sweeping out of the desert to attack train stations, blow up trains and railways, then fade away into the vastness of the Hejaz. If Lawrence was able to persuade the Bedouin Hashemites to fight for Arab independence, then they could immobilize thousands of Ottoman troops and reduce the threat of attack on the lifeline of the British Empire, the Suez Canal.”

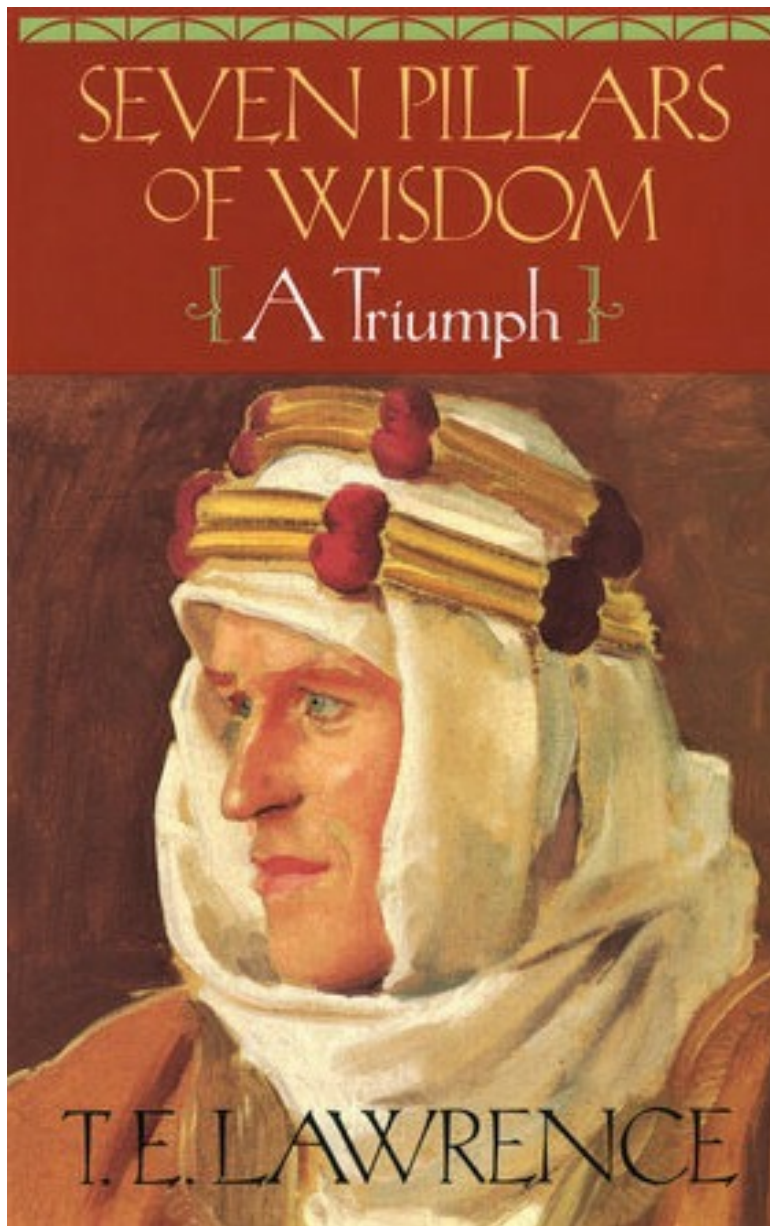


Map of Hejaz railway from Damascus to Medina – Attilios, Ferrocarril del hiyaz, Wikimedia

“Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is difficult for a kid to read,” Giovanni said, “I had to look up a lot of words. Lawrence has an unusual way of putting things, more like poetry than prose. I’d read sentences twice and still not understand what he was saying. Then there were moments when suddenly, it was crystal clear.”

“You have to read Lawrence for a while before you get used to the language. Like reading William Faulkner for the first time — you have to become accustomed to a unique style. Lawrence studied Greek at Oxford. Greek is the father of Cyrillic and our Latin script. Derived from the Phoenicians, the Greek alphabet was the first script to have separate letters for vowels and consonants. Lawrence had an affinity for Greek and later translated Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey* which explains the Greek words in *Seven Pillars*.”

“When Papa read *Seven Pillars* after dinner, he’d stop reading and explain things. He said the 800 mile Hejaz railway from Damascus to Medina was the Ottoman Empire’s only supply line through Syria, Palestine, and Arabia.



Seven Pillars of Wisdom, completed 1922, published 1926 – fair use, penguinrandomhouse.com

“Lawrence,” I said, “made a mathematical calculation — to defend 800 miles of railway, how many square miles would the Turks have to defend? He came up with 100,000 square miles. How could the Turks defend all of that? He was aware of the Turkish army’s advances in artillery, airplanes, and armored trains, but to defend 100,000 square miles, the Turks would be forced to support a fortified post every few miles manned by twenty or more men. That would take an army of 600,000. To protect the railway against a small band of Bedouins would require a thousand times more Turkish troops.”

“I see what Lawrence was proposing. The Arabs on camels would come out of nowhere, dynamite the rails, then melt into the trackless wastes of the Hejaz as silently as they’d come.”

“Materials and armaments,” I said, “were scarce in the Turkish Army — men more plentiful than equipment. The Bedouin’s task shouldn’t be to kill Turkish soldiers but to destroy his weapons and infrastructure. The destruction of a bridge or rail or armored car accomplished more than the death of a Turkish soldier. Generals saw men only in the mass. But Lawrence’s Arab irregulars were individuals. Being small in number they couldn’t afford casualties. One man’s death was like a ‘pebble dropped in water,’ Lawrence said, ‘the rings of sorrow expanding ever outward.’”

“I remember those words,” Giovanni said.

“Clausewitz, writing a century earlier, said that the first thing a commander has to determine, is what kind of war he is fighting. Do not turn it into something that is alien to its nature. Find out its true nature. Clausewitz said that there were two broad types of war — a war to achieve limited aims, and a war to render one’s adversary militarily impotent. Lawrence realized that the complete defeat of the Turks was not necessary, just render them helpless to defend the lifeline of the railroad. Clausewitz believed that the supreme art of war is to subdue your enemy with the least amount of effort.”

“That’s the principle of judo.”

“Lawrence understood that to make the Arab fight like the British wouldn’t work. Lawrence’s task was to appreciate the Arab way of war. The orthodox maxim of war had always been to maintain superior forces at the moment of attack. Lawrence came up with a corollary — while the Bedouin forces would be weaker than the Turks everywhere, Lawrence said, at the precise point of attack, they would be strongest. Their advantage was speed and time. Most wars were wars of contact, both sides striving to avoid surprise and attacking at their advantage. ‘Armies were like plants,’ he said, ‘immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems.’ But Lawrence imagined a rootless army with no front or back, a vapor drifting across the desert ‘containing the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert.’”

“How could a novice intelligence officer carry out such an ambitious plan?”

“In the beginning, he couldn’t. He had to wait for events to develop. First, Britain had to find out if the Arabs were dead serious about revolting against the Ottomans. In 1915, Lord Kitchener had directed the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry McMahon to approach the spiritual leader of the Arabs, the Emir of Mecca, Sherif Hussein ben Ali, to find out if the Arabs would join Britain against the Germans and Ottomans. Educated in Islamic doctrine and law in Istanbul, Sherif Hussein acquired a love of poetry and memorized the

Qu'ran by heart. Although the Ottoman Empire controlled the administration in the Hejaz, Hussein was a descendant of Muhammad and the head of the Hashemites, which had been one of the Arab world's most distinguished families since the 10th century. As the spiritual leader of the Arabs, he was responsible for the holy sites of Mecca and Medina and the pilgrimage, the *hajj*. Emir Hussein learned that the Young Turks who'd seized power from the Ottoman Sultan in 1908, were planning to extend the Hejaz Railway to Mecca and take control of the holy places. Encouraged by his second son, Abdullah, Emir Hussein began exchanging letters with High Commissioner McMahon about the possibility of an Arab alliance with Britain."

"Why," Giovanni asked, "would a Muslim emir put faith in a deal with Christians who were fighting an Islamic country?"



Emir of Mecca, Sherif Hussein ben Ali, proclaimed the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire, 1916 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Hussein feared that the Young Turks were going to depose him. Hussein wrote to McMahon saying he’d support Britain under the condition that they recognized an Islamic Caliphate, an empire stretching from Egypt to Syria and Mesopotamia. McMahon goal was to convince Hussein that Britain would support Arab independence if they supported the Allies against the Ottomans. Since the Turks were offering the Arabs more autonomy to retain their loyalty, head of Cairo intelligence Clayton said that if Britain refused to consider the aspirations of the Arabs, they ran the risk of throwing them back into the arms of the Turks. McMahon’s letter was noncommittal regarding Palestine. However, since Jerusalem was one of the holiest cities of Islam, Hussein couldn’t be expected to exclude Palestine from a future Arab state. McMahon couldn’t have foreseen that an Arab administration for Palestine would be overturned two years later by the Balfour Declaration which supported the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and the large-scale Jewish immigration that followed.”

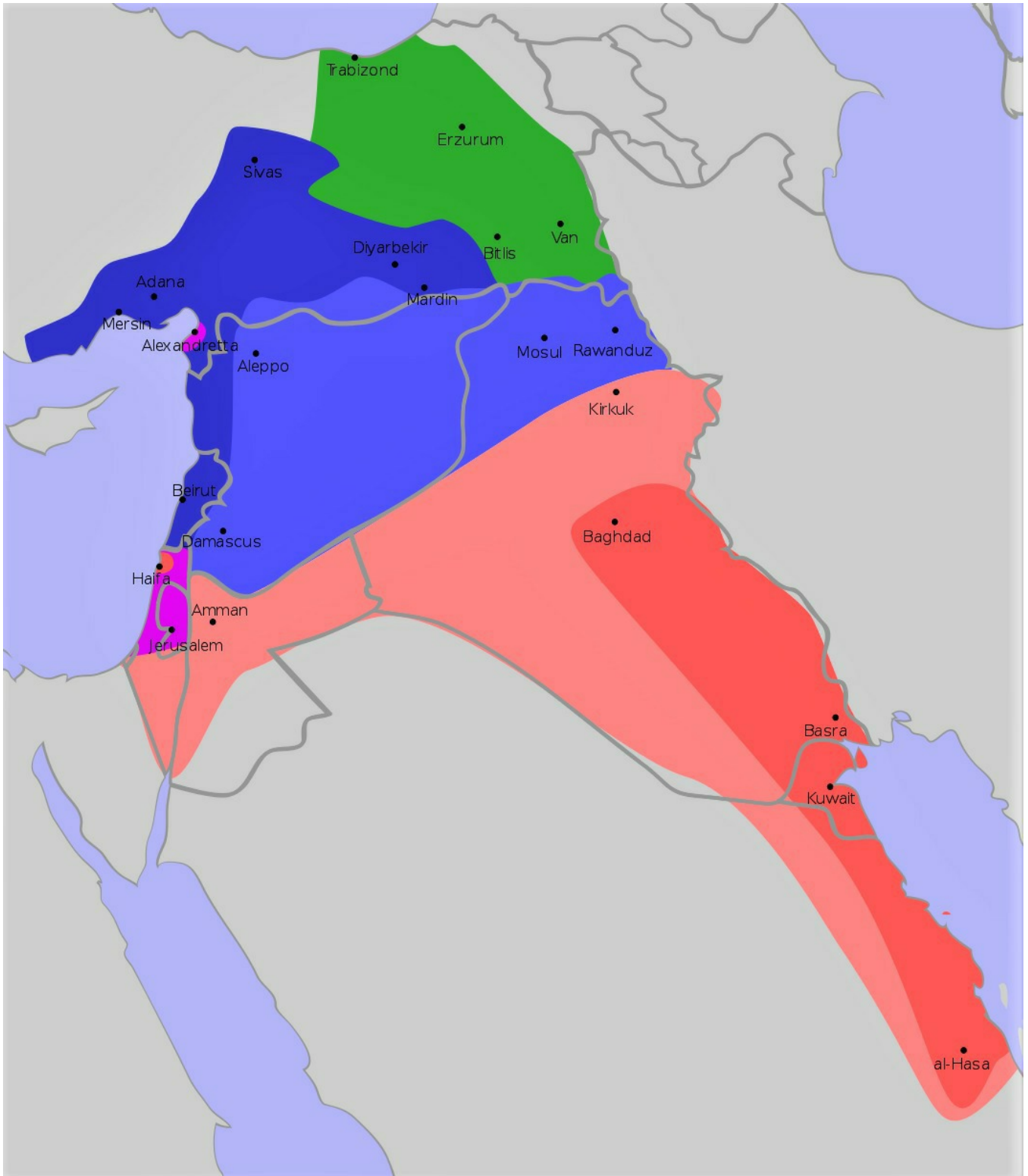
“It appears,” Giovanni said, “that Britain had promised something they couldn’t deliver.”

“When the Viceroy of India learned of McMahon’s promise to Hussein, he was outraged. The Indian Expeditionary Force was advancing on Bagdad, and the India government was planning a new Anglo-Indian colony in Mesopotamia. The annexation of the oil fields of Basra was necessary for the lifeblood of the Empire. The formation of an autonomous Arab state in Iraq was unacceptable. In addition to the Government of India’s determination to overturn McMahon’s commitment to the Arabs, they were also contradicted by the Sykes-Picot agreement of which the emir was unaware. For the Arabs, McMahon’s words were a guarantee of independence. For the British, the agreement was a means to an end.”

“What was the Sykes-Picot agreement?”

“France, England, and Russia agreed that if they defeated the Ottoman Empire, they would establish mandates over the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Britain would take control of Palestine and the oil concessions in lower Mesopotamia, France would take control over Syria, Lebanon, and Northern Iraq, and Russia would get Istanbul and the Dardanelles Straits. Unfortunately, they forgot to consult the Arabs.”

“World War I,” Giovanni said, “was awash with treaties. Did Lawrence know about the Sykes-Picot agreement?”



Sykes-Picot Agreement – Zones of influence established by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement at a Downing Street meeting, December 1915 to divide the Ottoman Empire when defeated in World War One: French (blue), British (red), Russian (green). Zone A, French Protectorate, Zone B, British protectorate, International zone, Palestine. France would get Syria and Lebanon, while Britain took the oil rich Euphrates Valley of Mesopotamia. They were not yet aware that the Arab lands not included in the agreement, the future kingdom of Saudi Arabia, would prove to have the greatest oil reserves on the planet.
 – Rafy, JewishVirtualLibrary.org, Wikimedia



British High Commissioner Sir Henry McMahon – Portrait painting by John Collier, Life Photo Archive, public domain, Wikimedia. Co-author of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence with Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca. The Bolshevik's disclosure of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement that promised Syria to France destroyed McMahon's relationship with Hussein bin Ali and Faisal, leader of the Arab Revolt.



Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan and *Sirdar*, commander of the Egyptian Army, 1899 – Unknown author, *The River War*, vol. I, by Winston Churchill, public domain, Wikimedia. A master of Arabic, Wingate published in 1891, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan* on the rise of Muhammad Ahmad and the Dervishes of Sudan, based on captured documents and interrogation of Dervish prisoners.

“Because it was secret, he only learned about it later. At least it was secret until the Bolsheviks exposed the Sykes-Picot agreement to the world after the October Revolution. Kitchener’s envoy, Mark Sykes, had negotiated the treaty with a French diplomat, François George-Picot, both of whom were convinced that the Arabs were incapable of governing themselves. The Sykes-Picot agreement promised Syria to the French, whereas the McMahon letters to Hussein promised Syria to the Arabs. Believing that France and Britain had agreed to the independence of Syria, the Emir told his son, Feisal, ‘Never doubt Great Britain’s word. She is wise and trustworthy; have no fear.’”

“As a low-ranking officer tied to his desk in the Cairo office, how did Lawrence manage to get physically involved with the Arab Revolt?”

“Although Lawrence was still a second lieutenant in Cairo intelligence, his audacity, persuasiveness, and compelling personality was beginning to have an impact on Clayton, Storrs, McMahon, and Wingate. As Gertrude Bell said, ‘He could light fires in cold rooms.’

“How was Lawrence able to talk his superiors into taking up his idea of asymmetrical warfare?”

“It took a lot of effort over a couple of years. The idea of Arab guerilla warfare against the Turks faced many obstacles. The British bureaucracy in Cairo was complicated with three primary centers of power; number one, British High Commissioner Henry McMahon, the highest civil authority in Egypt to which Clayton’s Arab Bureau answered, number two, General Archibald Murray, commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and finally, Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan and *Sirdar*, commander in chief of the Egyptian Army.”

“All with overlapping turfs.”

“Twenty overlapping turfs. Twenty separate military and governmental departments were making British policy in the Middle East, including the Viceroy of India which wanted to annex Mesopotamia for India. Cairo was adversarial turf with intense maneuvering between the three centers of power. For example, General Murray was attempting to take Clayton’s Arab Bureau away from High Commissioner McMahon. Within an antagonistic bureaucracy, Lawrence was in a weak position. As a novice intelligence officer, his only advantage was that he had the ear of Clayton who’d managed to infiltrate all three centers of power.”

“How did he manage that?”

“Very cleverly,” I laughed, “Not only was Clayton spymaster of the Arab Bureau under Commissioner McMahon, but he was also Cairo Agent of the Sirdar, Governor of the Sudan, Wingate, and liaison officer between Murray of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and Commissioner McMahon. Lawrence’s ideas for the Arab Revolt would never have taken hold if it hadn’t been for the octopus tentacles of General Clayton. *In Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence describes Clayton as calm, detached and clear-sighted, a leader who gave freedom of operation to his subordinates and worked by influence rather than command. ‘It was easy to describe his influence. He was like water or permeating oil, creeping silently and insistently through everything. It wasn’t possible to say where Clayton was and was not.’”

“I think,” Giovanni said, “this is the moment, when Lawrence joined the Arab Revolt.”

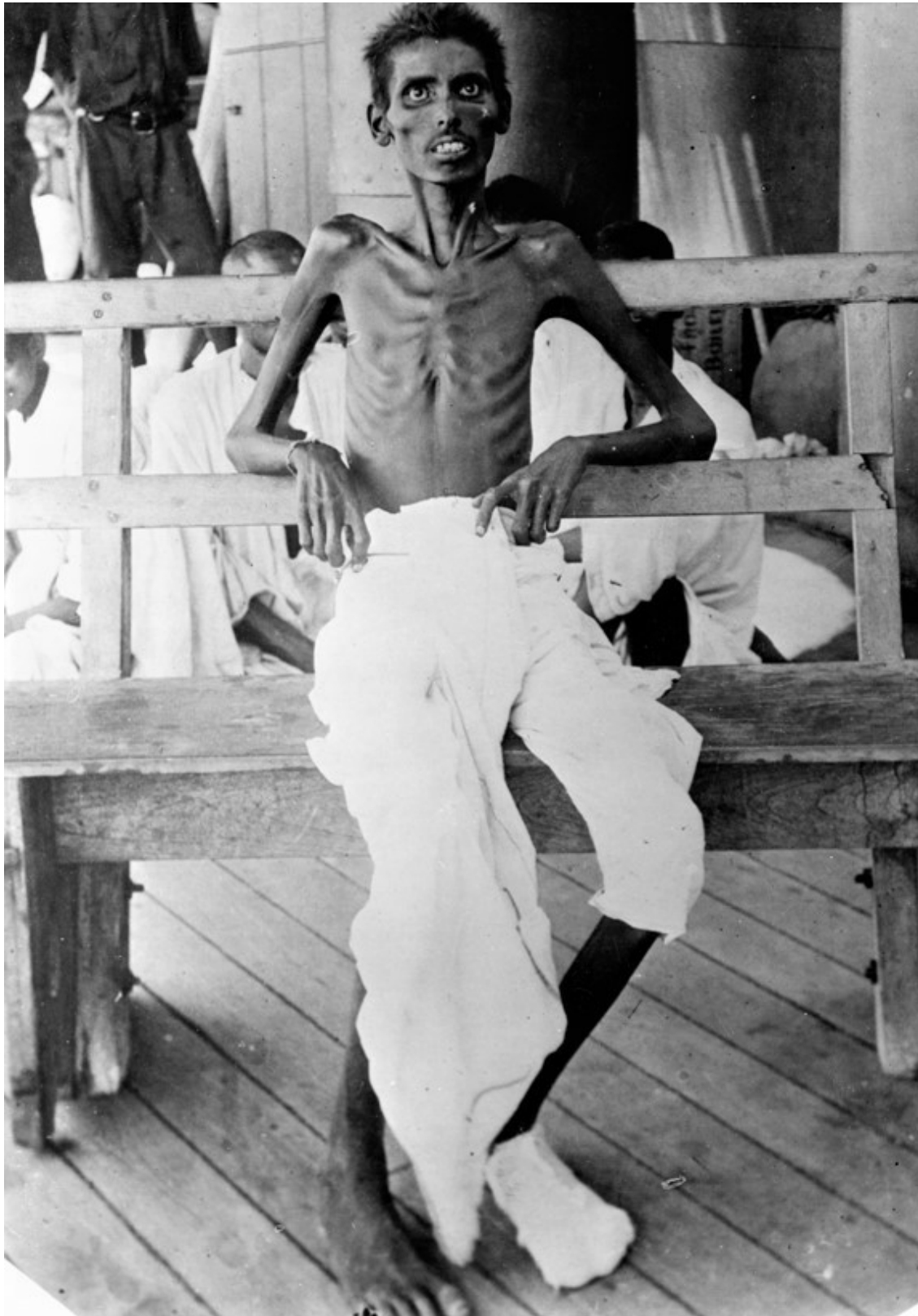
“Not yet. His first venture out of Cairo in 1916 was a quixotic quest to Mesopotamia to rescue the Indian Expeditionary Force of 17,000 that was under siege by the Turks at Kut-al-Amara, south of Baghdad.”

“Rescue 17,000?”

“After the Anglo-British forces conquered Basra, General Townshend’s army moved up the Tigris River toward Baghdad. Despite outnumbering the Turks two to one, the British failed to take Baghdad and retreated to Kut-al-Amara where Turks under the command of German General Baron von de Goltz held Kut under siege. Due to the Tigris River flooding its banks, the British forces were cut off from reinforcements. Three desperate attempts by the British to lift the siege failed at the cost of 23,000 British killed or wounded, twice as many as the army they were trying to rescue. To avoid the total loss of the surrounded Anglo-Indian army, Minister of War Lord Kitchener came up with the scheme of bribing the commanding Turkish general. Lawrence and two British officers were sent on a secret mission to offer the Turks £2,000,000 in gold to allow Townshend’s army go free. Knowing that the British were out of food and decimated by disease, the Turkish Minister of War, Enver Pasha refused the bribe and demanded Townshend’s unconditional surrender. After 147 days of siege, Townshend had no choice but to surrender 13,000 men on the verge of starving to death.”

“Jesus!” Giovanni exclaimed. “That’s as great a catastrophe as at Gallipoli.”

“Quite right. The Indian Expeditionary Force’s capitulation was the single largest surrender of troops in British history. The Turks marched the prisoners to Aleppo where thousands died in captivity of disease and brutality. It was a great boost for Turkish morale. Britain’s forces were doing as badly in the Middle East as on the Western Front. Time after time they’d suffered defeat. Lawrence was ashamed to play a part in Kitchener’s



An Indian army soldier who survived the Siege of Kut-al-Amara in the 1916 British Mesopotamia Campaign – Unknown author, public domain, UK National Archives, Wikimedia. The Ottoman Army, by German general and military historian General Baron von de Goltz, who over a period of 12 years had modernized the Ottoman Army had surrounded the British-Indian Army, trapped by the Tigris River and unable to break out. After a desperate rescue attempt by a second British Army failed, and his troops were dying of starvation and disease, General Charles Townshend surrendered to Hali Pasha. The surviving 13,000 Allied soldiers, many from India, were marched to captivity in Aleppo where the greatest number of them died. Some historians view the defeat at Kut as the most shameful capitulation in Britain's military history

scheme to bribe the Turks, but his report on Mesopotamia and the failures of British intelligence helped increase his reputation in Cairo.”

“I’d like to read the Mesopotamia report.”

“It gives insight into how Lawrence’s mind worked. The thoroughness of his analysis and suggestions for improvements are astonishing. He praised the political intelligence under Sir Percy Cox and criticized military intelligence under Colonel Beach who had a staff with little experience in intelligence and unable to speak Turkish or Arabic. British political and military intelligence headquarters were strictly separated with staffs that hardly knew each other. The offices in Basra, Amara, and Nasiriya had no knowledge of any of the local languages, knew nothing of the customs of the Turks and Arabs and examined prisoners and refugees through interpreters.”

“Lawrence’s concept of guerilla warfare,” Giovanni said, “preceded Mao Tse-tung who said twenty years later, ‘the guerrilla warrior must move among the people as a fish swims in the sea.’”

“There was one officer in Basra who Lawrence thought was indispensable. Captain More was the solitary member of the intelligence staff who was well travelled in Syria and spoke Arabic and Persian. Like Lawrence, Captain More believed that if you’re going to swim in the sea, you’d better get to know the fish. Lawrence criticized the worn-out printing machines, the cheap quality of the paper which stretched in the moist air of Basra, the poor penmanship of the map makers, place names mangled, thousands of errors which Gertrude Bell was laboring to correct. Much of the terrain between Sheikh Saad and Kut where most of the combat took place, showed nothing but the main channel of the Tigris. The aerial photographs were drawn up by someone who’d never made topographical maps, inaccurate and difficult to read, printed on soft paper which ripped in the wind making them practically worthless. Lawrence said that serious photography should only be done by an airplane dedicated to that purpose with a map making office set up in a well-constructed tent to protect the photographic dark room and printing machines from dust storms, the stone plates replaced by zinc plates which couldn’t be broken, important field maps to be printed on linen paper for durability and modern printing machines installed to run off two or three thousand copies in multiple colors, blue on the artillery maps to distinguish rivers, lakes, floods, and marshes — a critical factor along the flood prone Tigris.”



Reconnaissance observer of the Royal Flying Corps with an aerial camera attached to the fuselage, 1916 – Imperial War Museum, Wikipedia

“I can see,” Giovanni said with a smile, “how Lawrence’s medieval research and archeological training made him a meticulous observer.”

“While Lawrence critiqued the British administrative system, he praised Sir Percy Cox and Captain Wilson for their diplomatic outreach to the Arab leaders. He documented the British efforts to rebuild the destroyed Turkish civil records, agricultural leases, rents, rights of way, taxes, key crops of dates, rice, barley, and wheat, and the importance of the Tigris to clean the marshes by flooding, the river silt deposited by flooding being the only nourishment of the soil.”

“Lawrence had the gifts of a teacher,” Giovanni said. “His report was a good model for training intelligence agents. What was Gertrude Bell’s work in Basra?”



Gertrude Bell's workers at the excavation of the Byzantine settlement of Badensehir, Binbirkilise, Turkey, 1907 – Author, *Gertrude Bell*, *Oxford handbook of Byzantine Studies*, public domain Wikimedia.

“Lawrence championed Bell’s work. He knew she was one who could be trusted for accuracy. When Cox appointed a major from military intelligence to be the correspondent to the Arab Bureau in Cairo, Lawrence told Cox, that they needed someone who could evaluate opinion in the villages, religious movements, and tribal affairs, study the personalities of leading sheikhs and politicians and the geographical distributions of tribes. Lawrence told Cox that the only person qualified to collect and analyze the Arab data was Gertrude Bell. When Lawrence arrived in Basra, Gertrude wrote to her family that upon Lawrence’s appearance ‘life has been greatly enlivened. I’m delighted with our great talks. We are making schemes for the government of the universe.’ Lawrence believed that with her drive and knowledge of Arab culture and unique woman’s persona, Gertrude would succeed in getting from intelligence officers the data which she needed to complete her analysis. His report recommended that the Arab Bureau go easy on the Mesopotamians for they viewed the British as a colonial power whose only purpose was to exploit them for Britain’s advantage.”

“What was Lawrence’s proposal,” Giovanni asked, “to overcome the distrust of the Mesopotamians?”



The Euphrates River, Mesopotamia – Sergeant James McCauley, public domain, Wikipedia

“In the first place, the British had failed to clarify why they were there. The British had entered Mesopotamia, Lawrence said, ‘like sphinxes’ without saying why they came and what they intended to do. A clear statement of intentions would make it clear so the Arabs could make a decision on who they would support, the Turks or the British. The chief thing for the British to accomplish, Lawrence advised, was to build a complete irrigation scheme that would improve the life of the tribes and ensure the prosperousness of Mesopotamia.”

“What Lawrence was saying in his Mesopotamian report,” Giovanni said, “was the British government didn’t have a clue about the people they were ruling.”

“He was appalled by British insensitivity to Arab culture. The Arabs associate politeness with greatness, but they weren’t received by the Anglos with decorum, cigarettes, and coffee. The disregard for the Pashas, the failure to speak in Arabic and maintain Arab rituals was inexcusable, he said, especially during the second year of occupation. The administrators didn’t fathom the importance of the religious divide. Besides the Sunni landowners and a few tribes of Bedouin, 70 to 80 percent of the population was Shia. The rivalry between Shia



Bedouin, Wadi Rum – Nemo 67, Shutterstock

and Sunni sects and the proximity of Shia Iran made the issue of religious and political equality an essential requirement. If the Shia-Sunni conflict were ignored, it would lead to failed governance.”

“While Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “became renowned for being a seasoned guerilla fighter, but in reality, he was a scholar, anthropologist, diplomat, statesman, and writer.”

“Great military commanders have an intellectual streak. Many are good writers. If you read Lawrence’s writings, you’ll understand what a perceptive observer he was of men and culture. To grasp Lawrence’s identification with Arabs, you must read *Twenty-Seven Articles*.”

“What were the *Twenty-Seven Articles*?

“After he pulled off the conquest of Aqaba, the high command asked Lawrence to give advice to British officers sent to the Hejaz. Lawrence composed *Twenty-Seven Articles* to advise the British soldier how to win the hearts and minds of Arabs. They must immerse themselves in the culture — learn their tribes, clans, and families, their wells, hills, and roads. Lawrence was appalled by British army officers who believed they were more intelligent than the Arabs — a superiority complex which had served them badly at Gallipoli.



Portrait Emir Faisal Bin Hussein, Paris Peace Conference, 1919 – Author, Harry Chase, Lowell Thomas, Marist Special Collections B&W glass plate, public domain, Wikimedia

“He gave explicit advice — deal only with the Arab commander under which you serve. Never lay hands on an Arab. You will lose respect. Bedouins have a prejudice against the hat. If you wear a hat, your Arab friends will be ashamed of you. They believe the hat is founded on an irreligious principle. When traveling with a tribe, wear an Arab head cloth which protects you against the sun. If you wear Arab clothes, wear the very best. Clothes are important to the tribes. If you wear Arab dress, then go the whole way and be at ease in them. Leave your English customs behind and take up Arab habits. Never give orders, reserve your advice for the commander, despite the temptation to deal directly with his troops. Your job is advisory and your counsel is due to the commander alone. If you associate too closely with the subordinates, you will end up going behind the leader and destroy your influence.

“Centuries of tribal raids have taught them more than you’ll ever know. Keep your companies small, 100 to 200 men. A great number will end in confusion. A sheik from one tribe cannot give orders to men of another tribe. Do not attack trenches with Bedouins for they will not tolerate casualties. You must rise above tribal jealousies. If you associate with a clan and their feuds, you will lose prestige. Share the Sherif’s attitude towards the tribes. The Arabs take precedence seriously. You must attain it. Do not mix Bedouins and Syrians for they hate each other. Do not combine tribesmen with former Arab officers in the Turkish army. The cultures of Arab townsmen and Bedouins don’t hold each other in high regard. Combined operations with them lead to strife and failure.”

“Did he speak of Islam?”

“He advised, ‘Don’t speak freely about women. It’s as sensitive a subject as religion.’ Islam is such a pervasive force that it resides in every corner of a Bedouin’s existence. The conviction of his faith is visible in every principle of life. Islam is as essential to them as sleep or food. ‘Don’t try to do too much for the Arabs. You are here to help them, not to win it for them. It is their war. With our support, they can win it for themselves.’”

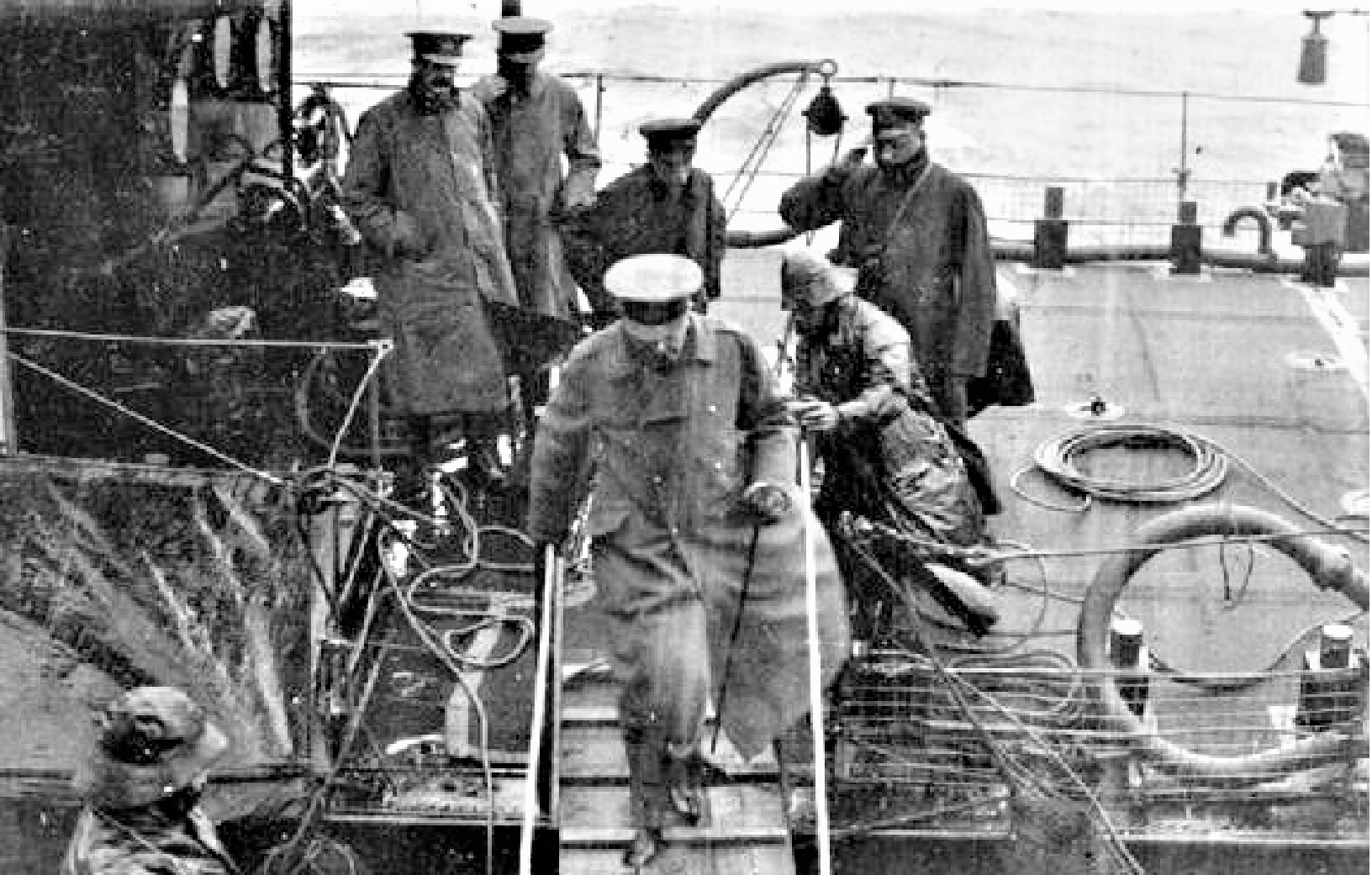
“Hearing Lawrence’s report, I can understand how with absolutely no military training, he won the confidence of his superiors.”

“Lawrence had read military theorists for many years — Carl von Clausewitz, Maurice de Saxe, Antoine-Henri Jomini, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, Alfred von Schlieffen, Colmar von der Goltz, and Ferdinand Foch.



Carl von Clausewitz (1780 – 1831) “The backbone of surprise is fusing speed with secrecy.” – Portrait by Karl Wilhelm Wach, public domain, Wikimedia

“His analysis of the situation in Mesopotamia impressed many but it didn’t immediately get him out of the Bureau into the war. When he returned from Basra, he published a new periodical, the *Arab Bulletin* to be circulated within the government. While Lawrence was still confined to the Cairo office, the Arab revolt began in June of 1916 with Emir Hussein mustering several thousand troops, only one out of five being armed with a rifle. Ironically, at the same day as the revolt began, the man who’d done the most to support the Arab Revolt, Secretary of War Lord Kitchener was killed. En route in a heavy gale to the port of Arkhangelsk on a diplomatic mission to Russia, the cruiser HMS struck a mine laid by a German submarine near the Orkney Islands and Kitchener perished. Without Kitchener’s support, the Arab Revolt may have never happened.”



Field Marshal Lord Kitchener boarding HMS *Iron Duke*, 5 June 1916, believed to be the last photo of Kitchener before his death – Unknown author, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia. On a diplomatic mission to Russia to discuss military strategy with Tsar Nicholas II, the HMs Hampshire steaming toward the Russian port of Arkhangelsk during a gale stuck a mine laid by a German U-boat and sank. Lord Kitchener perished along with 737 others. Only twelve survived. Kitchener’s death was considered a greater blow to Britain than many German victories.

“Where did the Arab army first strike?”

“The holiest city of Islam, Mecca. Fighting against Ottoman troops who were armed with superior German weapons during weeks of bloody house to house combat, the Arabs surprisingly took Mecca. The desecration of Islam’s holy city by the indiscriminate use of Ottoman artillery became a propaganda weapon for the Hashemites. Supported by the bombardments of the French and British navies, the Arab armies took the coastal cities of Jeddah, Rabegh, and Yenbo, but utterly failed in the attack on the Medina fort where the Arab Bedouins fled in terror under a ferocious artillery shelling which they’d never encountered before. Britain sent out to the Hejaz, Lt. Colonel Stewart Newcombe, Colonels Cyril Wilson, Pierce Joyce, and Herbert Garland, inventor of the Garland mine to assist the Arab rebellion where they discovered the Arab Army wasn’t receiving the arms, ammunition, and supplies which the British had landed on the coast. Feisal and Abdullah couldn’t feed or pay their troops.

“There were many problems, one of which was Feisal’s father, Hussein’s concern that if British Christian soldiers were sent to the Hejaz, it would strengthen the Turks claim that the Revolt was a crusade against Islam. The other problem was that Cairo’s direction was splintered by the rivalry between General Murray of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and McMahon, High Commissioner in Cairo, and Wingate, Governor-General in the Sudan. General Murray didn’t want to send a large force to help the Arabs because the British policy dictated from London, was to concentrate every man possible on the Western Front. Secondary theatres of war would be given the minimum of troops, only enough in Egypt to protect the Suez Canal. Determined against an escalation of troops, artillery, and airplanes, Murray said there would be no further campaigns. Then came the reorganization which would propel Lawrence into combat.”

“What was the reorganization?”

“Murray stripped Lawrence’s commander, Clayton of his military intelligence work, leaving him only the Arab Bureau which was severed from military intelligence. Lawrence immediately asked for a transfer to the Arab Bureau, but the new head of intelligence refused to let him go — an unexpected blow which threatened to end his role in the Arab Revolt.”

“Jesus, how could he get around that?”

“He became obnoxious,” I laughed.

“Obnoxious?”

“Lawrence’s idea was to be intolerable — correcting his associates’ English, rubbing in their ignorance about the Arabs until his new commander was delighted to get rid of him. To circumvent General Murray’s control, Clayton put a request through to London for Lawrence’s transfer to the Arab Bureau. Until it was granted, Clayton recommended that Lawrence accompany the Oriental Secretary, Ronald Storrs to Jeddah to meet Sherif Hussein’s son, Abdullah, leader of the Arab Eastern Army which had taken Mecca and Jeddah.”

“Finally, he was going to meet a leader of the revolt.”

“Indeed, it was his first foray into the field. His traveling companion to Jeddah, Ronald Storrs, a fluent Arabist and graduate in Classics at Cambridge, had been the intermediary for Lord Kitchener in his relations with Emir Hussein before the war. As widely read in Greek as Lawrence, Storrs was the conversationalist he’d been waiting for.



Oriental Secretary Sir Ronald Storrs, later governor of Jerusalem, 7 July 1920 – Author, Matson Photo Service, public domain, Wikimedia

“Because of his subordinate position during the meeting with Abdullah, Lawrence didn’t reveal his ideas, but when they began discussing the Turkish garrisons, due to months of studying maps and years of traveling in the Near East, as Syrian, Circassian, Anatolian, and Mesopotamian names came up, Lawrence astounded Abdullah by naming the Turkish unit in each garrison. Abdullah said to Storrs, ‘Is this man, God, to know everything?’”

“Knowing how cagey Lawrence was, Giovanni chuckled, “I wouldn’t put it past him to have come up with the numbers out of thin air. What did he think of Abdullah?”

“Lawrence found Abdullah to be cheerful, full of bonhomie, jesting with his tribesmen, entertaining them with readings of Arab poetry. Although an astute politician of great ambition, he was a sensualist who looked first after his pleasures. Although the revolt had begun with a promising start, it had devolved into a stasis which wasn’t going anywhere. Lawrence decided that the rebellion lacked leadership. Abdullah was too humorous, too self-satisfied to lead a revolution. Lawrence was looking for a passionate prophet who would set the desert on fire.”



Wadi Rum, Transjordan – Author, Bill Perry, Shutterstock

“When Abdullah asked why the £10,000 in gold, weapons, and munitions which Britain had promised, hadn’t been delivered, Storrs told him that Britain was holding it up because the War Committee didn’t have an idea what was really going on in the Hejaz. They needed to put an officer on the ground to liaison with Feisal’s Northern Arab army and furnish intelligence to the British command. Lawrence then broke in to say the fateful words — ‘I’m the man to do it.’

Abdullah said he’d ask Feisal to come down to Jeddah to debrief Lawrence, but Lawrence said no, he must go into the mountains to meet Feisal. For a non-Arab to enter the interior was unheard of at that time. It was forbidden by the Qu’ran. Storrs contacted the Sherif of Mecca on the phone and in fluent Arabic convinced him that if they wanted British arms, it was mandatory for Lawrence to meet Feisal in his mountain camp in the valley of Wadi Safra. After two years of sitting in a Cairo office studying maps, Lawrence set off with the Sherif of Mecca’s sanction on a hundred-mile journey riding at night through areas controlled by hostile tribes, forty hours on a camel’s back whose hard spine made riding miserable especially if one hadn’t been on a camel in two years.”

“Lawrence must’ve been ecstatic to be finally in movement,” Giovanni said. “The thousand miles he had walked in 120-degree heat studying Crusader castles in the deserts of Syria, had prepared him for extreme hardship. Lawrence believed that the way to handle pain is ‘not to mind it.’ What did he find in Wadi Safra?”



Emir Faisal's camp at dawn in Wadi Safra where Lawrence first met Faisal – Unknown author, public domain, Imperial War Museum, Wikimedia

“Lawrence’s meeting in Wadi Safra with Emir Feisal, the third son of Hussein bin Ali, Grand Sharif of Mecca, was the beginning of a deep friendship, a critical step in organizing and propelling the Arab army.”

“What was his first take on Feisal?”

“Lawrence describes Feisal as tall, slender, and graceful, dressed in white silk robes, a head cloth bound with a cord of scarlet and gold, ‘his face a mask against the still watchfulness of his body.’ Thirty-one years old, Feisal moved with a beautiful gait and royal dignity, and was soft spoken with a profound gift of listening to the counsel of tribal chieftains. Over time, Lawrence would discover that Feisal’s main weakness was shifting his views, being easily influenced by his most recent advisor. More imposing physically than his brothers, restless in movement, clear-skinned as a Circassian with dark hair and vivid eyes, Lawrence said Feisal looked very much like Richard I in the monument at Fontevrault. Feisal’s great talent for persuasion was necessary to resolve the rivalry between the fractious tribes. Lawrence thought that of all of Emir Hussein’s sons, only Feisal had the combination of qualities necessary to lead the Arab Revolt. Lawrence was searching for a prophet and found him in Feisal — proud, hot-tempered, impatient, and impulsive with an inclination to go off on tangents, a man of many moods but possessing great personal magnetism — a prophet who would bring full glory to the Arab Revolt.

“After Lawrence returned from the Hejaz, Clayton sent him to Khartoum to debrief Governor Wingate. Until that point, Wingate was under pressure by French Colonel Brémond to order an invasion with a large Allied Force. The Arabs are pusillanimous fighters, Brémond said. They’d flee at the first onslaught. Nothing could be accomplished against the Turks in Arabia except with thousands of regular troops.”

“What was Lawrence’s conclusion?”

“A large European force would be a disaster. It would validate the Ottoman’s propaganda portraying the British as Christian Crusaders. The Arabs would tolerate a small number of advisers and technicians and aircraft, but an Allied invasion of Christian troops would only drive the Arabs back to the Ottomans. Unlike the British officials, Lawrence understood that the Arabs were determined to free themselves. One Arab sheik said to Gertrude Bell, ‘You don’t give freedom. You take it.’ The Arabs didn’t want thousands of British troops. They wanted guns, artillery, and munitions. Although he was an officer in the army of Great Britain, Lawrence’s deepest sympathy lay not with British, but with the Arabs. He wanted them to win their freedom. After listening to Lawrence’s counsel, Wingate agreed to send planes and machine guns to Feisal.”

“However, as soon as Lawrence left, once again persuaded by French Colonel Brémond, Wingate reversed field and ordered British troops up for deployment. When Lawrence heard of the reversal, he answered Wingate’s memo with blunt words of advice. He told the Governor that while the Arabs were grateful for the help, the fact remained that Britain had taken over several Muslim countries. ‘The Arabs are fearful of an English occupation of the Hejaz. A British invasion will destroy the Arabs will to fight.’”

“I can imagine,” Giovanni said, “that for British colonialists, Lawrence’s advice was hard to swallow.”

“It was hard for British officials to follow Lawrence’s contrarian approach. While the military wanted the Arabs to capture the Ottoman fortress in Medina, Lawrence’s idea was to do the opposite — let the Ottomans stay in Medina. Don’t shut down the Hejaz railway completely. He recommended to blow up small sections of track, allow them to repair it to bring in just enough supplies for the Turkish garrison isolated in Medina to survive. At that moment, Lawrence’s primary adversary was not just the Ottomans but the French Colonel Brémond who was pressing for a joint French-British attack on Akaba from the sea. Brémond intended to prevent the strategic port of Akaba from falling into the hands of the Arabs.”

“How did Lawrence stop Brémond’s idea?”



Wadi Rum, Jordan – Author, Ester Inbar, Wikimedia

“It took a great deal of effort. A short time after the revolt began, the War Committee in London, decided to pursue an invasion of Akaba. Lawrence countered the proposal by reporting to General Murray that to take Akaba it would require a naval expedition and a landing from the sea on a beach that was dominated by Ottoman artillery emplacements in the surrounding hills that were constructed in a series one behind the other into the mouth of Wadi Itm. Even if the British could land three divisions on beaches raked by artillery fire, they would have to proceed up the gorge of Wadi Itm with precipices of one to two thousand meters in height. narrow as 100 meters in width, the dry stream bed blocked by boulders where only two camels could pass abreast. Along the 40-kilometers-long canyon, the Ottomans had prepared thousands of defensive emplacements high in the cliffs which gave the Turks the ability of shooting the advancing British troops like fish in a barrel. To attack Akaba from the sea was a suicide mission which would end as tragically as at Gallipoli. Instead of a massive invasion of regular troops, the only way to proceed was by asymmetrical warfare.”



Grand Canal Parc de Sceaux – Le Blog de Francine

“If the British and French military was so set on it,” Giovanni asked, “how could a subordinate officer talk the military out of attacking Akaba?”

“It was the result of subtle maneuvering on Clayton’s part and Lawrence’s credibility due to his command of Arabic and intelligence work in the Hejaz before the war. Confronted with the problem of Colonel Brémont’s proposal of an invasion of thousands of troops in the Hejaz and quite aware that General Archibald Murray was opposed to sending troops to Arabia, Clayton forwarded Lawrence’s warning to not attack Akaba from the sea to General Murray who in turn forwarded Lawrence’s memo to the Imperial Chief of Staff in London who passed it on to the Foreign Ministry and War Offices. For the first time, Lawrence’s opinion was read by the military brass in London.”

Giovanni stood up and stretched, raising his arms toward the sky. “Are you feeling more relaxed after your massage?”

“I feel sublime. My gluteus maximus and minimus are feeling so fine. You are as gifted with your hands as you are with your trumpet.”

“The clouds are wonderful today,” Giovanni exclaimed. “Let’s go for a walk along the canal.”



Tassili des Ajjers – Author, Septfontaine, Wikimedia

***Most wars were wars of contact. Ours should be a war of detachment.
We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert.***

— T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*